LAURELL K. HAMILTON

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

MARVEL BEST-SELLING AUTHORS TAKE YOU INSIDE THEIR WORLDS:

HAMILTON ON ANITA BLAKE, VAMPIRE HUNTER!

MARTIN ON HEDGE KNIGHT!

MARVEL

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PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

This month's *Marvel Spotlight* takes you inside the Marvel Best-Selling Authors line with two of its biggest and brightest talents, *New York Times* best-selling novelists Laurell K. Hamilton and George R. R. Martin!

I: Vampire Noir: Anita Blake Comes To Marvel

Laurell K. Hamilton brings her outrageously popular series of novels to Marvel Best-Selling Authors! Putting her stamp on the vampire-hunting mythos since the early '90s, Hamilton has built a franchise from the continuing exploits of the brassy, Midwestern vamp-detective — and Laurell is here to tell us all about it!

II: Meet Anita Blake: Artist Ron Lim Enters the World of A Vampire Hunter

A comic art pro since the mid-'80s, Ron Lim has quite a prolific record of achievement behind him as longtime penciler of *Silver Surfer* and Spider-Girl's MC2 Universe! Now he takes the reins of the premiere Best-Selling Authors title *Anita Blake*. The vampires are awaiting you, Ron…!

III: A Knight For Our Times: An Interview With George R. R. Martin

Prelude novellas to George R. R. Martin's masterpiece quadrilogy *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Hedge Knight* and *Sworn Sword* have been expertly adapted in Marvel Best-Selling Authors fashion by artist Mike S. Miller and writer Ben Avery (who is also interviewed about his role in telling the tale). For his part, George R. R. Martin is on hand with a wide-ranging interview discussing *Hedge Knight* and his standing as one of the first members of the Merry Marvel Marching Society!

IV: A Writer's Fairy Tale: A *Spotlight* Look At Marvel Fairy Tales

As a complement to our coverage of Laurell K. Hamilton and George R. R. Martin, this month's *Spotlight* looks at C.B. Cebulski's adaptations of classic folk tales, fables and fairy tales done Marvel style! Featuring the X-Men, Spider-Man and the Avengers, the Marvel Fairy Tales series has charmed readers young and old and C.B. is on hand to give us an inside look!

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VAMPIRE NOIR
ANITA BLAKE COMES TO MARVEL
LAURELL K. HAMILTON BRINGS HER OUTRAGEOUSLY POPULAR SERIES OF NOVELS TO THE MARVEL BEST-SELLING AUTHORS LINE!
BY CHRIS AND MELISSA ARRANT

THE LANDSCAPE

of comics is one flush with all manner of creature, character and conscience -- from superheroes to supernatural, from high concept to low brow, and from personal revelations to time-spanning adventures. But the newest addition to the medium is one that has proven to turn heads – inside and outside comics.

Laurell K. Hamilton with husband/ collaborator Jonathon D. Green

Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter is the story of a vampire slayer unlike any you have known before. She's direct, she's rude and she does it all in the service of keeping a rein on the supernatural with whom she is forced to live side-by-side. She does that in her day job as vampire hunter, and she does it with her night job – reanimating the dead. She's a savvy, Midwestern girl with a long list of clients, including a retainer with regional law enforcement.

Buffy Summers she's not.

Anita Blake was born in the pages of the eponymous prose novel series that is now going on fifteen volumes, the product of writer Laurell K. Hamilton. This #1 *New York Times* best-selling author made her literary debut with a short story in Marion Zimmer Bradley's

Photo by Richard A. Nichols

Fantasy magazine. Since then she has gone on to establish a career in fiction that mixes mystery, fantasy, magic, horror and romance. There were over six million copies of the *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* in print ... and that was before her blockbuster stories made their way to comics.

Debuting in November 2006, the serialized comic book adaptation of the first Anita Blake novel, *Guilty Pleasures*, sold out numerous times, and when the first six issues were collected in a hardcover, it rocketed to the number one ranking for graphic novel sales in American comic stores. Adapted by Stacie M. Ritchie and Jess Ruffner-Booth with illustrations by Brett Booth, it made for a fresh new take on Hamilton's beloved character for those coming from the prose novels, and made big inroads for comic fans who were new to the vampire hunter's universe.

It's 2008, and Anita Blake returns – in two forms! One is the second half of the *Guilty Pleasures* adaptation, illustrated by comics veteran Ron Lim. The other is *First Death* – the hardcover edition of the highly sought-after two-issue limited series with a new story penned by Laurell K. Hamilton herself.

As both series make their way into book stores and comic outlets, Laurell K. Hamilton made time to talk with *Marvel Spotlight* about the first steps, the final outcomes and the lasting effects of Anita Blake – both in comics and in prose.

WHEN I STARTED THIS JOB, I THOUGHT WE HAD TO WHISPER. MANNY TOLD ME THAT VAMPIRES CAN HEAR OUR HEARTS BEATING. THEY KNEW WE WERE COMING.
THIS PLACE STINKS OF VAMPIRES...

FIRST DEATH, FIRST KILL: Anita and her partner Manny get ready to get their hands dirty in the original story "The First Death." (Art from *Anita Blake: The First Death #2.*)

SPOTLIGHT: You've been authoring the series for going on fourteen years, with the only visual representations being book covers and the descriptive images of Anita that come from your own imagination. What's it like to see your characters – your stories – fully illustrated?

LAURELL: I'm very visually oriented, and I can't draw, so finally seeing my characters as art was just entirely too much fun. It's made me wish I could draw – again!

SPOTLIGHT: *Anita Blake* has been illustrated by a number of artists – comic artists Ron Lim and Brett Booth, and various book cover illustrators over time. What's your evaluation method for deciding who's "right" for drawing Anita Blake, Jean-Claude, and the rest of the cast?

LAURELL: Brett did character sketches before the deal was signed; in fact his sketches were one of the things that pushed me over the edge for signing. When we went looking for a replacement, we asked for character studies of Anita, Jean-Claude and Phillip. After we found Ron Lim, who fit the "feel" of the characters best, we sent notes back to him with suggestions for making the characters even closer to the vision of the novels. I've been very lucky in my artists, and apparently I speak pretty good "visual" so the artists and I communicate well most of the time. I am not an artist, and unfortunately never will be, so it's been a real learning experience to understand the process.

SPOTLIGHT: When you're writing, does the thought that your work might be translated to comics or film change the way you write early on?

LAURELL: No. The artists, and our writer, Jess Ruffner Booth, tell me that my writing is very visual already and makes it pretty easy to translate into a visual medium. Convenient for all of us.

SPOTLIGHT: The character of Anita Blake stands apart from the stereotypes of crime fiction, even supernatural crime fiction. Where did she begin, creatively?

LAURELL: I had just begun reading hard boiled detective fiction after college and found a huge disparity between the male detectives and the female detectives. The men got to cuss, kill without remorse and have sex. The women didn't cuss, if they killed someone they felt very bad about it, and any sex they had was sanitized or off stage. I thought this was unfair and set out to fix it. But I also felt that a straight mystery series wouldn't hold my interest. I'd had a life long love of horror in fiction and movies, myth and folklore, so I created a world where I could play with all those elements. Anita the character came first, then a world for her to play in.

SPOTLIGHT: And how do you think Anita has developed over time?

LAURELL: Anita has changed from a twenty-year-old that thought the world was very black and white, to an older person who sees shades of gray. My interviews with real life police and ex-military shaped her character in ways that I couldn't have foreseen. It made her more real.

She's gotten better at her job and more powerful. Her love life has certainly gone in directions I never planned. She's like one of those friends you try to give dating advice to, but they never take it. Her choices are her own. I support her choices, but her choices are not always mine.

She's become more real to me over time, more her own person, and less a voice for me. As I say somewhere else in this interview, our lives have diverged a lot over the last decade and change.

SPOTLIGHT: Some writers view their characters as a cast in a story they're writing, while others view themselves as observers in a world that they're documenting – letting their characters inform the direction of the story. Not to say yours fits neatly in one or the other – but what would you say your writing perspective is?

LAURELL: My main character is my camera on the world, so everything takes place in her view. So technically it's first person limited. Am I an observer in my world? Sometimes. My characters surprise me on a regular basis. But sometimes I am so far into Anita's headspace that it's not observing, but more participation. It can get very intense, at times. What's really interesting is when I'm so close to the character and she still does something to surprise me while I'm sort of writing as her. Then I have to pull back and go, "Wow." Those are days when the muse is flowing so heavy that I can lose hours in the writing and not realize it. There are also days when the writing crawls a sentence at a time. I hate those days.

SPOTLIGHT: Looking over your body of work, the *Anita Blake* and *Merry Gentry* series are the only two times that you've written in the first person perspective. Coming into it after *Nightseer*, your first book, why did you gravitate towards that for your writing?

LAURELL: I actually wanted to write *Nightseer* as a first person narrative, but my courage failed me. It was the first book I'd ever written and I just wasn't confident that I had the skill to do such a limited narrative and put everything in the main character's perspective. *Nightseer* turned out to be written completely as third person restrictive, so everything did take place from her viewpoint. The camera never left the main character so I could have written it from a first person perspective, but it would also have intensified the emotional content and I don't think I was ready for that as a writer. First person narrative is my style of choice, I think.

SPOTLIGHT: The stories of Anita Blake are primarily based in St. Louis. What made you pick that city as the home base?

LAURELL: It's Anita's home base because it's my hometown. Some writers seem to be able to read about a place and set a book there, but I can't. I need to — at *least* — visit a place to use it as background. I need to walk the streets, drive around, and get the feel of a place to use it in a book. I love driving around St. Louis and thinking, "Where will I put the dead bodies this time?"

SPOTLIGHT: (*Laughter.*) Do you have any plans to have your other novels, such as the *Merry Gentry* series, adapted to comics?

"I had just begun reading hard boiled detective fiction... and found a huge disparity between the male detectives and the female detectives... I THOUGHT THIS WAS UNFAIR AND SET OUT TO FIX IT."

– AUTHOR LAURELL K. HAMILTON ON THE ORIGINS OF THE ANITA BLAKE CHARACTER.

A GHOULISH SCENE: Vampires aren't the only menace of the night in Anita's world: ghouls are also a threat! (Art from *Anita Blake: Guilty*

LAURELL: At this moment, no. Let's get *Guilty Pleasures* completely finished before we add to our to-do list. Besides, I'm not sure there are enough caption or word balloons in the world to make Merry work in comics, because of the sexual content.

SPOTLIGHT: How were you originally approached about doing comic adaptations of your work – and did you have any thoughts of your own about comics work before this?

LAURELL: I'd never really considered doing comics until the Dabel Brothers got together with my agent. They offered me the one thing that means something to me creatively: Control.

SPOTLIGHT: You're known to be very engaged with your fans – online, at book signings and at conventions. Entering the many worlds of comics – it's a different kind of thing. How has it been for you – the fans, the conventions, and the online component?

LAURELL: It hasn't really been that different. I've been going to sci-fi conventions since I started writing, and there is a lot of crossover between them and comics. The fans are the same; the biggest difference with the conventions is that Comic-Con International (in San Diego) is overwhelming — rather than *merely* staggering like Dragon-Con. The online component doesn't seem that different.

SPOTLIGHT: You have degrees both in English and Biology – in the long run, which has more informed your work as it is today... and how?

LAURELL: Biology, I think. It helped give me a real life background for my monsters and an appreciation of what it takes to be a real scientist. I think without my science background, my world — and especially my supernatural stuff — wouldn't be half so convincing. The English degree helped me appreciate literature, but frankly, I'm not a big fan of writing classes. You learn to write by putting your butt in a chair and doing it.

SPOTLIGHT: Some readers have a tendency to view the lead characters of novels, especially first-person novels, as stand-ins for the author. With the tenor of the *Anita Blake* books, what has been your experience regarding this trend and how have you responded?

LAURELL: I'm not Anita or Merry. I've given them both a bit of my personality, which helps me write them, because I understand a part of them. I used to joke that Anita is me before therapy. We've diverged a great deal in the past 16 years. I've gone on to be married twice, have the suburban home, and the kid and dogs. Anita's gone on to have the highest kill count in literature outside of a war novel.

Merry is less like me, but more mellow than Anita. Anita isn't yet 30, so Merry has some of that calmness that comes to most of us in our thirties. Anita is still searching for her calm center.

SPOTLIGHT: If you had to say, who would be the character — male or female — that you find you have the most in common with?

LAURELL: Anita is closer to my voice. Richard's self-loathing is a part of me, too, though it took me years to realize it. What do I mean by that last part? Richard hates that he is different and can't be ordinary. I spent years struggling with the same issue. I'm more at peace with it now, and I'm hoping someday so is Richard.

SPOTLIGHT: *Guilty Pleasures* for you is a book that's over fourteen years old. Revisiting it in comics form – how has it been for you?

LAURELL: I didn't realize how unhappy Anita was in the early books. She did this really violent, difficult job, but she had almost nowhere to heal herself emotionally. When I wrote the book I couldn't see that. I also didn't realize that there is almost a mathematical formula that the grumpier she got around a guy, the more attracted to him she was. (Exception being bad guys that are trying to hurt her. Everyone gets grumpy at the bad guys.)

It was very educational to revisit Anita and see how far she's come. She's so much happier now than she was at the beginning.

"Am I an observer in my world? Sometimes. MY CHARACTERS SURPRISE ME ON A REGULAR BASIS."

– HAMILTON ON CONFIGURING HER STORYTELLING PERSPECTIVE.

REANIMATOR: "Raising the dead was my real job. The job I knew how to do." (From *The First Death* #2.)

MY BLOODY VALENTINE: A flashback scene to Anita's first meeting with the vicious Valentine. (From *Guilty Pleasures* #4.)

"I love driving around St. Louis and thinking, 'WHERE WILL I PUT THE DEAD BODIES THIS TIME?'"

– HAMILTON ON DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM ANITA BLAKE'S SETTING.

SPOTLIGHT: You wrote *Guilty Pleasures* during your first year living in Los Angeles – your first time living away from Missouri. How do you think that influenced how it turned out?

LAURELL: I wrote the first Anita story, "Those Who Seek Forgiveness," in Los Angeles. I began to create her and her world in Los Angeles. But I actually only began the novel there, and had to finish it after we had moved to St. Louis. If I'd stayed in LA longer, the series might have been set there, which would have made it a very different series.

SPOTLIGHT: What are the long-term plans for the *Anita Blake* comic series — are you doing more after *Guilty Pleasures*?

LAURELL: We've contracted the first three books in the series with Marvel: *Guilty Pleasures*, *The Laughing Corpse*, and *Circus of the Damned*. Since *Guilty Pleasures* is the shortest of the three books and it will take twelve issues to get to the end, it will take us years to just get through the first three books. Beyond that, we'll see when we get closer.

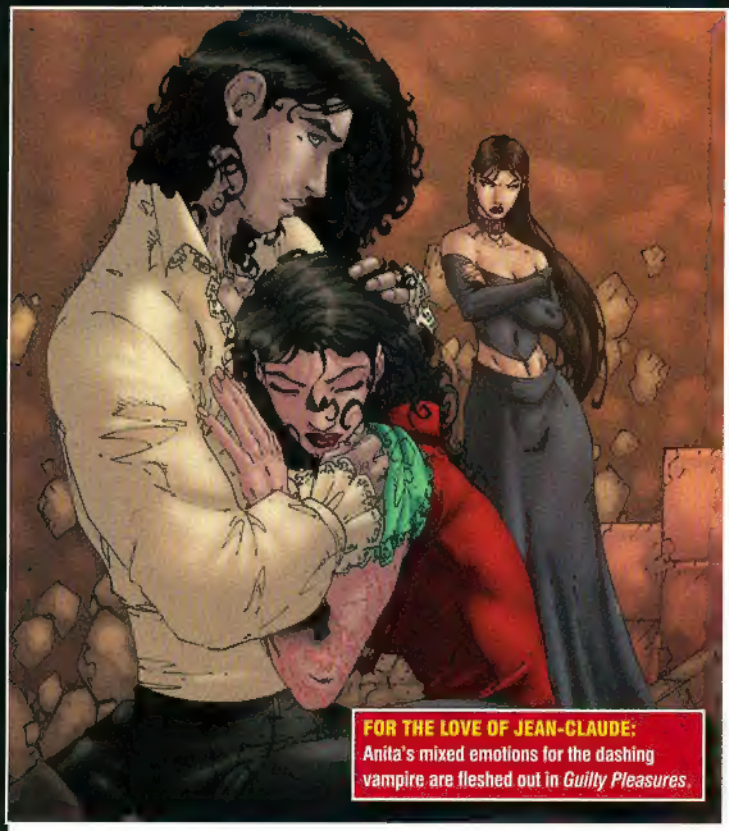
SPOTLIGHT: The first appearance of Anita Blake was in an unpublished short story that you wrote before *Guilty Pleasures* that's finally being printed in your short story collection, *Strange Candy*. Do you have any plans for that to be illustrated in comics as well?

LAURELL: No plans, but I'm not ruling it out.

SPOTLIGHT: You've said on numerous occasions how your husband, Jonathon Green, has been integral into the continuing success of your work. Can you tell us what he does for you, specifically relating to the comics work?

LAURELL: When we first started the adaptation, I couldn't "see" the art in the script. Jonathon had to print out the script and explain where the images and captions would go and how it would flow. I just couldn't "see" it, but he could. It was wonderful to have my very own comic geek to lead me by the hand. Then as the art began to come in, he helped me see the script and the art together before it was completed so I could give feedback. Now, I'm actually able to edit on screen both the art and script, and I can "see" the flow of it all. But in the early days, I was pretty confused.

When it came to writing both the extra story in the back of the hardcover of *Guilty Pleasures* and the two-issue special, *First Death*, Jon helped me write both. I'd never collaborated with anyone before and I wasn't sure I could, but we worked well together. He still sees comic and script better than I do, so I would write and he would help me break it down into visuals. He also helped me keep track of pace and timing. It was great being able to let him type while I paced, and we brainstormed together. Towards the end he put sticky notes up telling me how many pages we had until we had to wrap things up. I'm used to having hundreds of pages to play with, so the size restrictions of comics were very different. Jonathon helped me see that as a strength of the medium and not a weak-



FOR THE LOVE OF JEAN-CLAUDE: Anita's mixed emotions for the dashing vampire are fleshed out in *Guilty Pleasures*.

"It was very educational to revisit Anita and see how far she's come. SHE'S SO MUCH HAPPIER NOW THAN SHE WAS AT THE BEGINNING."

– HAMILTON ON HER RETURN TO GUILTY PLEASURES *FOR THE MARVEL BEST-SELLING AUTHORS ADAPTATION.*

ness. Frankly, I think it helped me come back to my novel writing with a cleaner eye, and a leaner style. It's always good when you've been doing something for a while to get a new perspective.

SPOTLIGHT: You've penned two new stories for the comics work: the short *Vampire Victim* and the two-issue limited series, *First Death*. How has writing specifically for comics been different than your prose writing?

LAURELL: You know how they say a picture is worth a thousand words? Well, it's worth more than that. In a novel, I'm stuck describing everything: clothes, rooms, everything. In comics, I give a verbal sketch of what is needed, and the artist makes it so. I write pretty much just the dialogue and the artist does the rest. It's so much faster than writing a novel. Dialogue is something I do well and I'm really fast at it, so script was incredibly fast for Jonathon and me. Jonathon is also very fast at script and good at dialogue, so it went really smoothly.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you see yourself doing more comics writing in the future?

LAURELL: I've really enjoyed working with Jonathon on the comics, so I wouldn't be averse to it. The trouble is finding time in my schedule.

SPOTLIGHT: What are your influences for writing comics – from the early years and now?

LAURELL: Since I never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would ever be writing for comics, I don't really have any earlier influences. It was my husband, Jonathon D. Green, who introduced me to the world of comics. I'd read some when I was younger, mostly *Spider-Man* and *Conan the Barbarian*, with some *Red Sonja* thrown in. But it was Jonathon's lifelong interest in reading and collecting that let me know how wide and amazing the world of comics could be. So, I guess in a way my husband — and the writer/adapter of our comics, Jess Ruffner Booth — are the only two influences I can cite. I sort of got thrown in at the deep end of the comic pool. And, happily, I'm swimming nicely!

SPOTLIGHT: You mentioned your background with comics. What are you reading these days?

LAURELL: As for what I read now, it's mostly *PS238* by Aaron Williams and a bunch of web comics. Phil & Kaja Foglio's *Girl Genius*, Jeffery Stevenson's *Brat-Halla*, Howard Tayler's *Schlock Mercenary*, Jennie Breaden's *Devil's Panties*. I actually have found that comics is like any other kind of writing: the more you actually get to work in the field, the less time you have to read anyone else's work.

SPOTLIGHT: Before we let you go and finish up your latest novel for us to read, let me ask one more question. The comic adaptation of *Guilty Pleasures* brought the world of Anita Blake to a whole new audience – comics fans. You've always kept in touch with your fanbase – how has the reception been with the fans you've heard from?

LAURELL: The reception from the fans has been really great. Some comics fans were reluctant at first to check it out; the fact that the industry buzz was so big won them over eventually. We've heard from a lot of people who read the first six issues and couldn't wait for the second half of *Guilty Pleasures* as a comic. They've told us that they went out and bought the novel to find out what happens next.

Also, we've heard from comic retailers that they've been seeing new customers in their shops who've come in for Anita, and have started reading other titles. People who initially wanted the books because they were based on my books are learning that not only are my comics cool, but that comics in general have a lot to offer for readers. I love the fact that my success is helping broaden comic readership in general.

NIKOLAOS VS. JEAN-CLAUDE: Two master vampires get ready to clash in this scintillating scene from *Guilty Pleasures #3*.

We love that, too, Laurell. And we love Anita Blake! It's a cornerstone title of the Marvel Best-Selling Authors line and Marvel couldn't be prouder of the fun and fantasy it is delivering to comic readers everywhere! Guilty Pleasures rolls on in 2008 to its climactic conclusion. By the time you have this hot little Spotlight issue in your hands, ANITA BLAKE: GUILTY PLEASURES #7-8 will be on stands, so go grab 'em! Also, look for the ANITA BLAKE: THE FIRST DEATH collected in its entirety in Marvel Premiere Hardcover.

MEET AN

Artist Ron Lim E

"The bulk of Marvel's stories take place in New York City and this is totally different. I had to go through the issues with a fine-tooth comb for reference..."

– Artist Ron Lim on the challenges of picking up Anita Blake.

ITA BLAKE

INTERS THE WORLD OF A VAMPIRE HUNTER

By Dugan Trodglen

Ron Lim has been a professional comic book artist for 20 years. After a legendary run on *Silver Surfer* during the late '80s/early '90s, Ron lent his crisp, expressive style to such "Next Generation" Marvel titles as *Wild Thing* and *Avengers Next.* Now he has joined the Marvel Best-Selling Authors artistic stable as the new penciller on *Anita Blake: Guilty Pleasures,* the wildly popular adaptation of author Laurell K. Hamilton's hard-boiled vampire detective novels. Ron is among the most established artists yet to work on the Best-Selling Authors titles, and for a veteran presence with an exciting, contemporary style, a better artist could hardly have been picked. *Marvel Spotlight* caught up with Ron to discuss his background, getting used to working in the exciting, mysterious world of Anita Blake, and about the process of a comic artist in his third decade of headline work.

SPOTLIGHT: Welcome to *Marvel Spotlight*, Ron! A main ingredient for being a comic book creator is a love of the medium from childhood. How did you discover comic books?

RON: As a little kid my parents used to buy me comics at the supermarket. It was the kids' stuff like *Archie* and *Hot Stuff* and things like that. I was into it but it wasn't anything that made an impact. But then one day my mom and dad brought home an issue of *Fantastic Four.* (I think it was *FF #121.*) It was my first exposure to super hero comics and that was it, man. I was excited. I wanted to collect this stuff. After that, every week I would go to the spinner rack at the store and pick out my one or two comics. That's how it started!

SPOTLIGHT: When did that love turn into, "Hey, I want to draw comics!"?

RON: I used to want to draw cartoons. I would copy Disney cartoons. Over time I started drawing a little bit of everything. When I saw *Fantastic Four,* I noticed it was quite a bit different from the Disney stuff. I don't know if I actually traced it or not, but I did copy straight from the comic pages. That started to become an obsession. Every chance I got I'd be drawing something.

SPOTLIGHT: When did you figure out which artist was which in comics and also which artists you preferred over others?

RON: The first artist where I really noticed his style was John Byrne. It was in *Star-Lord.* It was John Byrne inked by Terry Austin and I said, "Wow, this looks different." So I started collecting Byrne's stuff because it was so distinct. Shortly after that I started noticing other artists' styles and started following Jim Starlin, John Buscema and others.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you attend art school?

RON: I went to California State University in Sacramento. I majored in commercial art, advertising kind of stuff. I was trying to get into that. My goal was always comics, but that's always a long shot. I wanted to draw and I figured advertising was the most "realistic" thing to try to do.

So I did that, but in the meantime I kept doing samples and sending them to Marvel. All through college I would do my school stuff but at night I'd work on samples. I went to lots of comic book conventions and would show my stuff around. I finally got hired at a convention called Wonder-Con by then Marvel editors Tom DeFalco and Mark Gruenwald.

SPOTLIGHT: When was that?

RON: That was the very first Wonder-Con in California, so it must have been over 20 years ago. Wow! I brought my

ORIGINAL PENCIL ART: Artist Ron Lim's stunning pencil art before the coloring process. (Art from *Guilty Pleasures #8.*)

portfolio. They weren't really having a portfolio review, but they were looking at people's stuff. I got to the front and showed them my work and they liked it. They sent me a six-page Black Panther story that showed up in an anthology title six years later.

SPOTLIGHT: So it was a so-called "inventory" story, one that the company kept unpublished until they needed it for a given comic, right?

RON: Yeah.

SPOTLIGHT: Other than that story, which didn't show up for a while, what was your first gig?

RON: I guess after that Black Panther story they thought, "Well, he can kind of meet a deadline so let's throw him something else." They gave me *Psi-Force*, part of the New Universe line they were trying. That was my first regular gig. That was a lot of fun. It was my first monthly deadline, so there was a lot of pressure there. I didn't know if I could handle it! But it turned out okay. Once I showed I could do that I started getting more work here and there. It eventually led to my job on *Silver Surfer*, which is my favorite job I've had

SIGNATURE SERIES

SPOTLIGHT: *Silver Surfer* is probably what you are best known for. The book starring the cosmic hero was very popular at the time and you gave it a distinct look. How long did you work on the title?

RON: I started on *Silver Surfer #15* and left at *Silver Surfer #92*, so about six years. [*A run stretching from 1988 to 1994 Ed.*]. (I missed some issues from doing other things like *Infinity Gauntlet*.)

SPOTLIGHT: That's quite a run!

RON: I haven't come close since! (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Well, most people haven't! What about your years on the title, other than the sheer volume of work, is most memorable to you?

"It's definitely a different universe than I'm used to... I've never drawn guys with so much long hair before!"

– Lim, on switching from Marvel heroes to Anita Blake's world of vampires

RON: First of all, because *Fantastic Four* was my first comic, I read about the Surfer very early on and he was always one of my favorite characters. He appeared only sporadically here and there, so when he did show up I would eat it up. When I landed the series I was thrilled, and I got to work with writers like Steve Englehart and Jim Starlin, who, again, was one of my artistic heroes. That was a dream come true. Combine that with the things we did like bring back the character of Thanos, and I was just in hog heaven! The whole run I just loved. It was everything I wanted. Sci-fi is my favorite genre to begin with, and to do it with some of my favorite creators was just a blast.

SPOTLIGHT: After *Silver Surfer*, you have been closely associated with Tom DeFalco — one of the men who first hired you — on what was initially called the MC2 Universe, a "possible future" version of the Marvel Universe spearheaded by the popular *Spider-Girl* title. The MC2 titles features "next generation" versions of Marvel heroes, often the sons and daughters of the classic characters. Since the line launched in 1998 you have worked on a number of titles under that umbrella. How did you hook up with Tom in his special little corner of Marvel?

RON: When the line first launched, I worked with Tom on *J2*, the son of Juggernaut. After that wrapped up I did a limited series called *Wild Thing*, who was the daughter of Wolverine and Elektra. I think they just put that out in a collection.

SPOTLIGHT: They did, in a digest called *Spider-Girl Presents: Wild Thing*. [*On Sale Now! — Ed.*]

RON: After that, *Spider-Girl* was the only title from that line for a while, until editor Molly Lazer called and asked if I wanted to do the *Avengers Next* limited series with Tom and I said, "Heck Yeah!" That was a lot of fun.

SPOTLIGHT: What is it like helping reinvent character concepts for the next generation?

RON: It's a blast. A lot of character design was done by the time I got involved but I did some of that here and there. I just love the fact that it's kind of like the Marvel Universe a few years down the road. All the main guys are older with their kids taking over. I got to draw J2 again in the *Avengers Next* series and that was a lot of fun; I hadn't drawn him in years.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you design his look?

RON: No, I think Ron Frenz designed him. It's quite an interesting design. Biggest head in the Marvel Universe! (*Laughter.*) How do you fill that helmet?

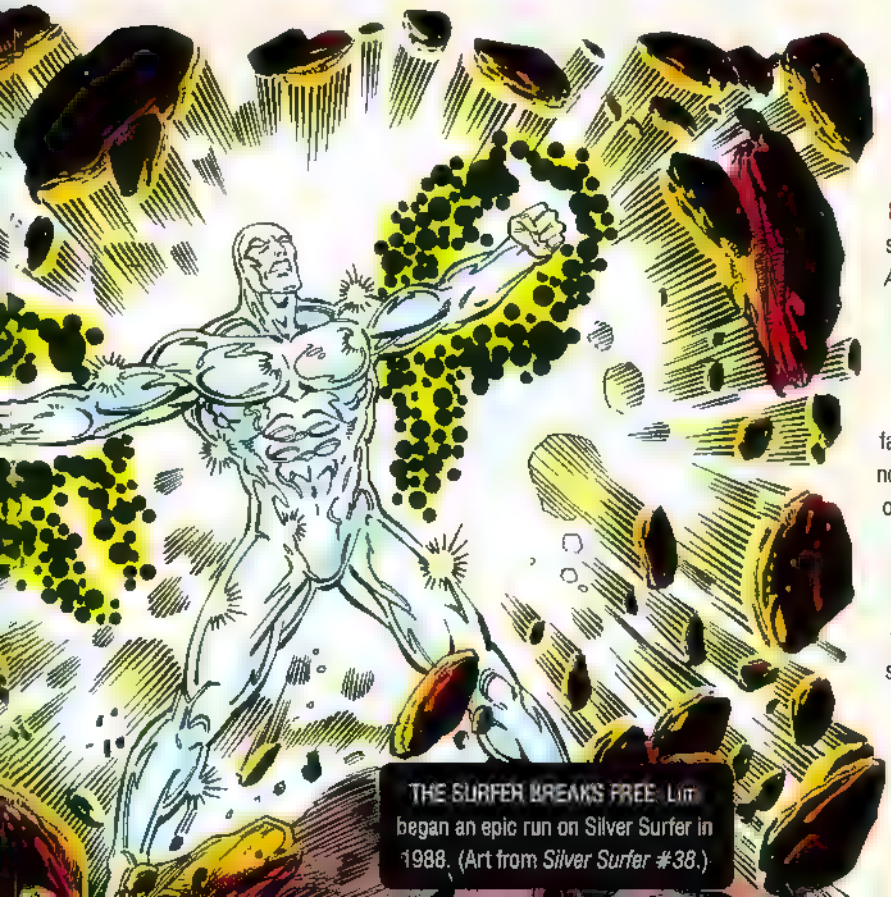
SPOTLIGHT: (*Laughter.*) It was a fun design.

RON: I love it. A giant head with this giant chin.

SPOTLIGHT: One of the best things about that "Spider-Girl" Universe is that the old heroes are still around as part of the cast. A lot of times in those future stories the previous generation is either dead or way too old to participate in adventures.

RON: Exactly. They weren't too old. They were still functional!

SPOTLIGHT: They could throw on a costume and rumble if needed!

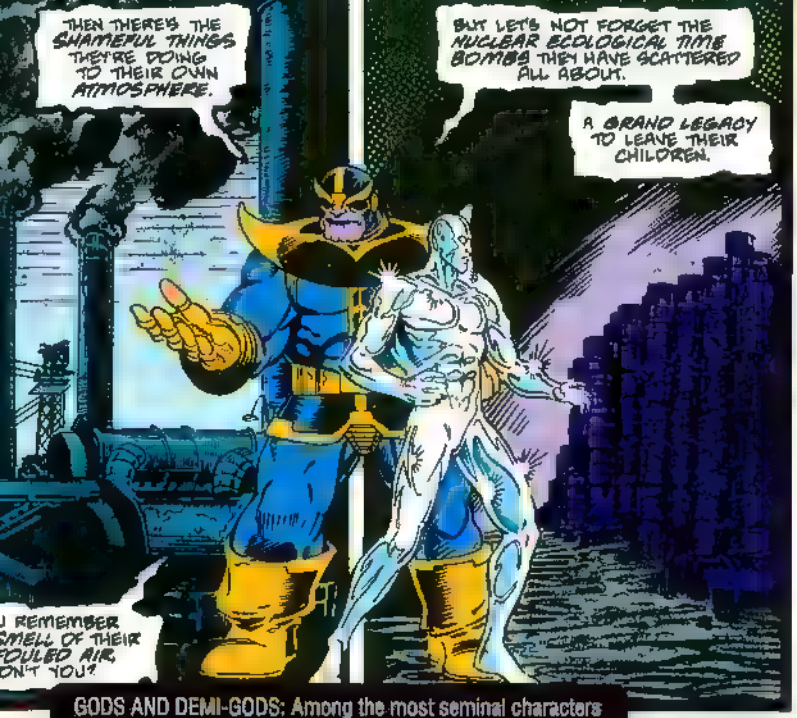


THE SURFER BREAKS FREE: Lim began an epic run on Silver Surfer in 1988. (Art from *Silver Surfer* #38.)

RON, ANITA. ANITA, RON.

SPOTLIGHT: Now you're working on something that's quite different for you: the *Anita Blake: Guilty Pleasures* series. How did you end up working on that?

RON: I got an email asking if I wanted to try out for it. To be honest, I wasn't real familiar with the comic. I knew about the novels, but hadn't checked out the comics, only because it wasn't a genre I pick up on. I do like horror stuff, but hadn't really drawn it before. So when the chance came up I thought it would be a neat opportunity to try something new and stretch my artistic skills. Then Marvel sent me the past issues for reference. I read the whole thing in one night and I thought it was really cool. It's definitely a different universe than I'm used to.


THEN THERE'S THE SHAMEFUL THINGS THEY'RE DOING TO THEIR OWN ATMOSPHERE.
BUT LET'S NOT FORGET THE NUCLEAR ECOLOGICAL TIME BOMBS THEY HAVE SCATTERED ALL ABOUT.
A GRAND LEGACY TO LEAVE THEIR CHILDREN.
REMEMBER SMELL OF THEIR FOULED AIR, DON'T YOU?

GODS AND DEMI-GODS: Among the most seminal characters of the cosmic genre of Marvel Comics stories are the Surfer and his nemesis, the destroyer of life, Thanos. (Art from *SS #35.*)

SPOTLIGHT: How does working in this world compare to drawing the mainstream Marvel Universe?

RON: Well, having drawn the Marvel Universe for so long, with the guys in tights and the muscles, Laurell at first would say that I was drawing the characters too super-hero looking. It never occurred to me to watch out for that, so I had to go back and refine the way I drew them. I had to draw them more...*realistically*, I guess (Or as Laurell likes to describe them, "sexy".) I've never drawn guys with so much long hair before! *(Laughter)* Outside of Thor, I guess So visually it's a whole different mindset.

SPOTLIGHT: You're dealing with completely different settings as well, compared to Marvel Universe stuff

RON: The bulk of Marvel's stories take place in New York City and this is totally different. I had to go through the issues with a fine-tooth comb for reference to make sure I kept a consistent look with the previous stuff

SPOTLIGHT: Do you deal directly with Laurell much?

RON: We've only spoken a couple of times. She's really nice and it's going to be a lot of fun working with her. I mainly work with Editor Mark Panicia, though there have been a lot of emails with Laurell.

SPOTLIGHT: Did Laurell's team provide you with a script in the "full script" style? [For those unfamiliar, back in the 60s, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby pioneered what became known as the "Marvel method," where only a plot was provided for the artist, who then drew the story and turned it back over to the writer to provide the dialogue and narration. In the last ten years or so, the industry has turned heavily back to the method of a writer providing a full script for the artist to work from.]

RON: Yeah, full script. It's all laid out, which makes it a little easier, since they do have a specific vision for the book. I'd hate to have to guess what they're thinking

SPOTLIGHT: How used are you to full script? How much of your career have you done "Marvel method" vs. full script?

RON: About half and half. With Tom DeFalco, we develop the plot together because we are so used to working with each other. It's a lot of fun too. When I worked with Jim Starlin, he provided detailed scripts because he knows what he wants.

SPOTLIGHT: And as an artist, he can certainly visualize what he's after

RON: Exactly. So I'm used to both styles

FANTASTIC FIVE: In tandem with frequent collaborator, writer Tom DeFalco, Ron Lim brings to life the exploits of one of the MC2 Universe's greatest super-teams. (Art from *Fantastic Five #5.*)

A DAY IN THE LIFE

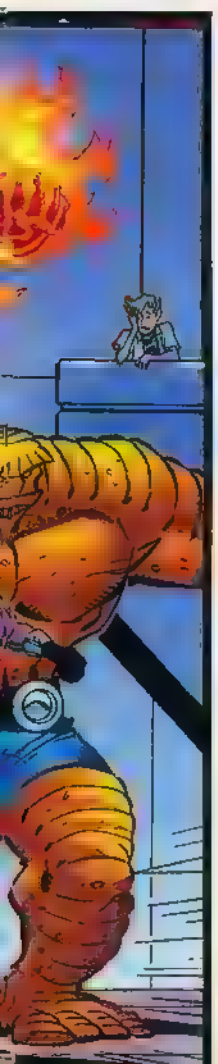
SPOTLIGHT: Because Laurell has a great deal of fans who have never read comics before, we may have some readers who are less familiar with the workings of comic books and how an artist operates. What is a typical working day like for you?

RON: I work a weird schedule. I get most of my work done at night. During the day I do layouts and breakdowns. For *Anita Blake* I do slightly tighter breakdowns because they want to review it and make sure certain details are right. I do that and once that's approved I go straight to pencils. I take a few hours doing straight pencil layouts. I usually do the figure work first, and then I do the backgrounds. In a typical day I can do about two pages, although the *Anita Blake* stuff is super-tight pencils, so it takes a little longer.

SPOTLIGHT: What exactly are "breakdowns" and "layouts"?

RON: When I have a page of script, I'll make thumbnails – four squares on an 8.5x11 paper and within those squares I do a broad version of the individual panels. Again, in this case I add more detail than usual so they can go over it. That's the first step.

For layouts, I take 11x17 paper and use blue pencil (because it doesn't photocopy) and draw the general flow of the page. Then I use my regular HB lead pencil with more detail in what is referred to as the "full pencils" stage. That's the most time-consuming part of course. That takes a few hours.

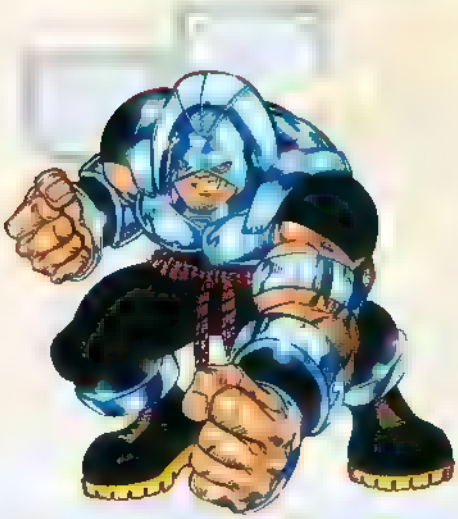


SPOTLIGHT: You said on *Anita* there are tighter pencils.

RON: With normal pencil pages, there's going to be an inking stage, where an inker darkens the lines, and adds detail to certain things. And for large areas of black, I can just put in a little "x" so they know to fill that in. For my *Anita Blake* pages, I have to fill these in myself with pencil shading.

On this book, the coloring process goes right from the penciled art, so anything an inker might add, I have to do. I still find myself adding the little "x's" before saying, "Wait, this isn't going to be inked!" (*Laughter.*) So I have to go in and add all of the shadowing and make sure the rendering is how I want it because that is exactly how it appears in the book. I haven't even seen an actual issue in print yet, so I'm sure I'll make some adjustments once I do see it.

SPOTLIGHT: Is this the first time your art has skipped the inking process? [*While still the dominant method, the inking of penciled art for comic book pages is occasionally bypassed as a stylistic choice due to advances in digital coloring. – Ed.*]



JUGGERNAUT, JR.. "Biggest head in the Marvel Universe!," says Ron about his MC2 character, J2! (Cover art to *Spider-Girl Presents Juggernaut Jr.: Secrets and Lies Digest.*)

RON: For interior art, yes. I've done covers like that before. That's what the previous artist did, and they wanted to keep the same look.

SPOTLIGHT: Most of the character design work has already been done for the *Anita Blake* comics. Are there any newer characters you have had a hand in crafting?

RON: There are a couple of characters, but most of the major characters have been taken care of. But I think my next issue features the first appearance of a fairly major character that I'll have to design.

SPOTLIGHT: You say you get more detailed as the day goes by. You obviously have to build up to the detail based on the way a page is constructed, but do you also gain focus?

RON: Yeah. Well, the later it gets, the quieter it is! (*Laughter.*) I can focus a lot better. My wife and I have a one-year-old and in the earlier part of the day I'm doing those breakdowns, which require less concentration as far as detail. I do have to focus on the story, but it's easier to break away from and come back to. But at night, everyone is asleep, it's quiet and I can sit down and really pay attention to the detail of my pencils.

SPOTLIGHT: It must be nice to work at home and be around your child.

RON: I wouldn't trade it for anything. The only problem is when there's a deadline and the baby's screaming and my wife's not home (*Laughter.*) Yikes!

I'll say! That sounds scarier than vampires or wererats! Thank you, Ron, for your time. Look for Ron's work as the new regular artist of ANITA BLAKE: GUILTY PLEASURES.

A KNIGHT FOR OU

An Interview With George R. R. Martin

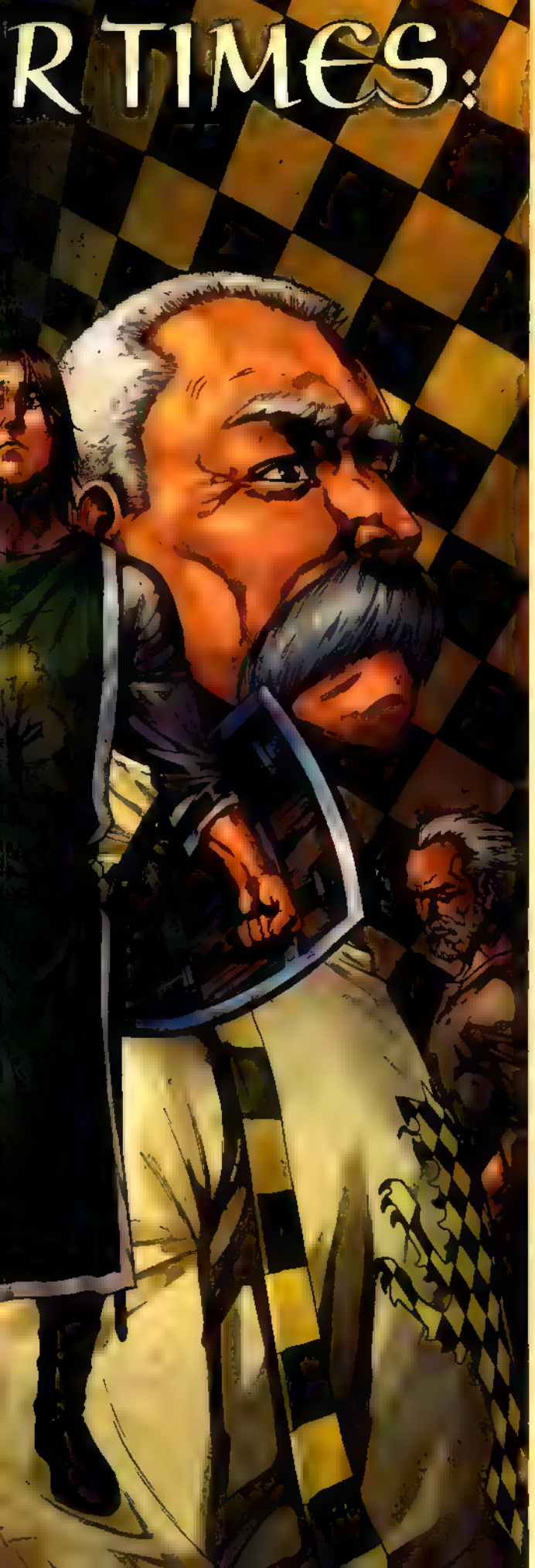
By Angel Collins

Martin's *Hedge Knight* And *Sworn Sword* Take Readers On A Journey To Ice And Fire

Author George R. R. Martin

Fans of fantasy fiction have long known what readers of Marvel Comics may just be finding out: author George R. R. Martin is a master storyteller. His four-part series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, established his reputation as one of fantasy fiction's most popular novelists, and the Marvel Best-Selling Authors line is proud to play host to the enchanting adaptations of two novellas that act as precursor to the epic. *Hedge Knight* and *Sworn Sword* are stories of knights, heraldry and chivalry, the kind which you may think you are familiar with, but through Martin's formidable grasp of history find that there is so much more to know.

In this *Spotlight* interview, we go back to the beginning – to the first novella *Hedge Knight* – and on the way, we meet George R. R. Martin, find out the secret ingredients that make his fiction come to life, learn what comics really mean to Martin and follow our intrepid knight and his precocious young squire as they leave the hedges and become Sworn Swords.



SPOTLIGHT: We're here to talk about the *Hedge Knight* graphic novels and I was wondering, why did you decide that *A Song of Fire and Ice* series needed a prequel?

GEORGE: Well, it was actually a case where there was an opportunity. A number of years ago (noted sci-fi author) Robert Silverberg put together an anthology called *Legends* and the idea of *Legends* was that he was going to get ten fantasy authors best known for their epic fantasy series and that each author would write a story set in the world of their best-selling fantasy series. And it was a great idea and it was a very exciting anthology to be in He had people like Robert Jordan, Stephen King, and Terry Pratchett, Ursula K. Le Guin...You know it was really an all-star line up and when he asked me to contribute to it of course I was very thrilled and excited to be part of that company, so I accepted and then I had to come up with a story.

In my case, the series was still going on. I wasn't going to complete it for a number of years yet, so it didn't seem that I could do a story that was set *after* the series without giving

"They essentially were the heavy warriors of their era and the hedge knights or the mercenary knights were blades for hire."

– Writer George R. R. Martin on the reality of medieval knights

away too much! So I decided a prequel was the only way to go. And I'd been doing a lot of work anyway just in terms of world-building, to flesh out the history of Westeros and the seven kingdoms and the kings that had gone before and some of the past history of the place – and for that reason I thought that with a prequel, there were a lot of good story opportunities.

SPOTLIGHT: Yeah, it seems like it would be

GEORGE: And now of course it's turned into a second series I've written two stories, two novellas about Dunk and Egg and I have a third one that's almost complete. I'm visualizing another half dozen or so to kind of follow those two characters through most of their lives.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you expect that to happen when you started?

GEORGE: Well, maybe not when I started, but by the time the *Hedge Knight* (the first story) was halfway finished, I had a good idea it would be that way, yeah

SPOTLIGHT: It's good to hear that it's not going to end relatively soon, as they're very interesting, richly drawn characters.

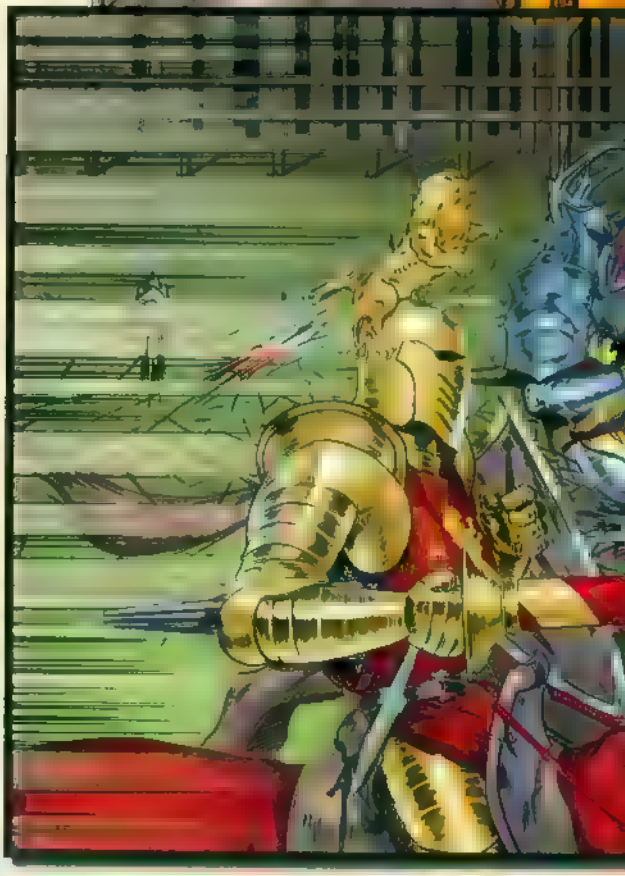
GEORGE: Well, thank you. I'm glad you like them

SPOTLIGHT: So how did you come up with these two characters, Dunk And Egg? What made you say to yourself, "I should start with this legendary knight and this future king?"

GEORGE: Well, I had done some work on the history of Westeros when I was writing the *Song of Ice and Fire*. One of the things I included in the very first book was a list of all of the Targaryen kings. I knew a little bit about each of these kings, but not a lot because I wasn't really telling stories about them, they were just kind of background to make it real. And one of the one-liners I came up with was "King Aegon V, Aegon the Unlikely". I'd already had Aegon IV, who was Aegon the Unworthy, who was a very corrupt king. And Aegon the Unlikely – almost the name came first.

Why was he "unlikely"? Well, it was very unlikely that he would become the king – he was very low in the line of succession. And it seemed to me that was an interesting story right there. If you're part of the royal family but you're, like, 17th in the line of succession – there's gotta be a lot of stories about how the crown ultimately comes to you. And I had told a very abbreviated version of some of that just in the dialogue in one of the *Ice and Fire* books and I decided it would make an excellent subject for more stories. And in that case I have to pick up the king when he is very young, and there are all these other people ahead of him in the line of succession.

As for Dunk – the viewpoint character - the idea of knighthood has always fascinated me and that's something I play with in *Ice and Fire*. In some ways it's a medieval version of the super-hero that you guys deal with a lot at Marvel. They don't have any particular powers, of course, but knights did have this whole chivalric code and super-hero ethos in some ways is descended from that. You're supposed to protect the innocent. You're supposed to fight for the good. And in real life the actual medieval history knights often did not live up to the ideal. They essentially were the heavy warriors of their era and the hedge knights or the mercenary knights were blades for hire. They were soldiers, they were killers, and there seems to be a wonderful tension between the ideal of what knighthood is supposed to represent and the reality of what it often did represent. And out of that dramatic tension I believe you can get some good stories.



SPOTLIGHT: So speaking of the super-hero ethos of the chivalric code, why did you feel like dedicating so much of that to the story? How did that element aid what you were hoping to accomplish by talking about the tourney and describing the pageantry of it – things seemingly remote from the typical super-hero comic?

GEORGE: I think the best stories are the ones you write for yourself and hopefully you find some other people who love them too. The medieval period has fascinated me as well as some of the things about knighthood, the pageantry, the heraldry. I collect miniature knights, miniature toy knights. They're different from soldiers of other periods because they're not uniformed. There's a tremendous amount of ego going on there! Again, in some ways it's very much

"You read a lot of fantasy and you never get that kind of realism. You always get, 'Oh my God! The Dark Lord is stirring and his evil minions are gonna come down and all life is gonna be wiped out! We have to fight the Dark Lord!'"

– Martin on the realistic fantasy of *Sword Sword*

like super heroes that you have there at Marvel. Each one has his costume that is his heraldry. You know, one guy has a chalice, another guy has a lightning bolt, and people have lions and eagles and because they're all wearing this armor you can't see their faces when they're in combat but you can see their costume. You can see their heraldry and tell what it is and all of that makes it tremendously colorful, much more so than just a fight between two soldiers in some modern war where both of them are just wearing uniforms so they just look like every other soldier. That's something that appeals to me and I think it makes for good stories.

SPOTLIGHT: Yes, it does. Of course, you know when you're used to reading about super heroes and all of the sudden you're reading about jousting it starts out seeming different but as you get into that world you start seeing where the connection is. It's pretty awesome.

GEORGE: I don't think I'll be doing a crossover with Spider-Man anytime soon. (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: I think you could handle it. (*Laughter.*) Okay, speaking of crossovers, tell me about your history with comics. Of course, I've read a little bit in my research but it's nice to hear the stories straight from a storyteller.

GEORGE: Well, I became a comic fan back in the dawn of time, probably before you were born.

SPOTLIGHT: (*Laughter.*) Thanks!

GEORGE: You know, I read comics as a kid, which is taking us back to the '50s and early '60s. At one point I actually decided – I think I was in 8th grade – that I was too old for comic books and I gave all my comic books away. That lasted about a year and then I decided

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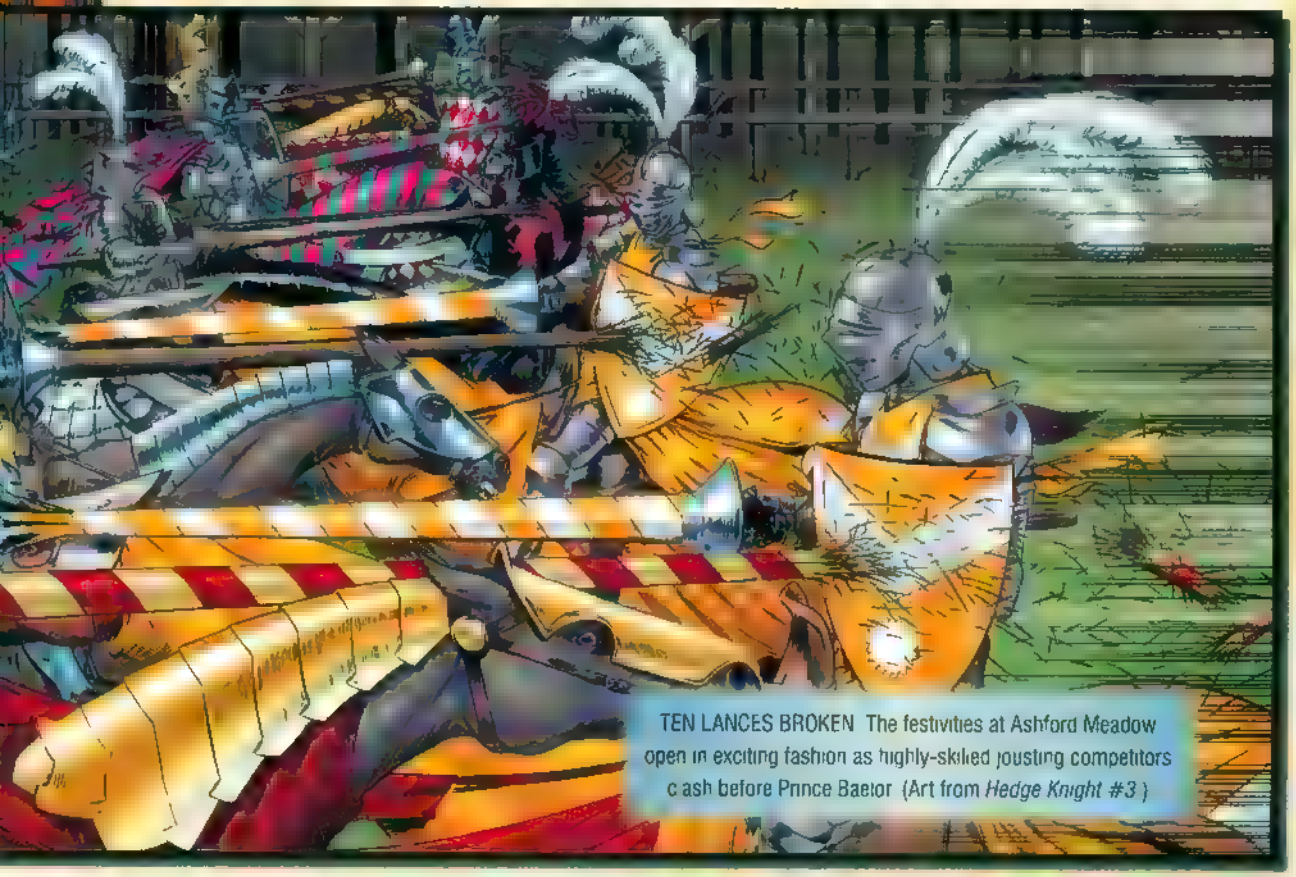


TEN LANCES BROKEN. The festivities at Ashford Meadow open in exciting fashion as highly-skilled jousting competitors c ash before Prince Baelor. (Art from *Hedge Knight #3*.)

I wasn't too old for comic books after all and I started buying them again. Fortunately, when I started buying them again it was just around the time when Marvel was starting to publish, when Marvel was becoming *Marvel* – moving away from the monster stories and introducing their first super heroes. And I remember buying *Fantastic Four #4*, which was the first issue of *Fantastic Four* that I'd seen and just being blown away by the different things that Stan Lee was doing there, the level of characterization and all that.

So I immediately had to dig up the first three issues. God, people ...they wouldn't sell it to you for the dime that it sold for! They really screwed you and you had to pay a whole quarter to get the first back issues! So I did, I ponied up my quarter and got the first three and I continued to follow *Fantastic Four* and I was there for *Spider-Man* and his introduction and for the *Avengers* and *X-Men* and all that great stuff.

I was in 8th grade, 9th grade, at the time, we didn't have junior highs in New Jersey. We just had high school and grade school. So for the later years of grade school and the early years of high school I was a stone comic fan, a Marvel fan. And I started writing letters to the letter columns, so the first thing I ever actually had published was I believe in *Fantastic Four #20*.

SPOTLIGHT: Wow, that was quick!

GEORGE: It was a letter to the editor and it said something like, "Shakespeare move over 'cause Stan Lee has arrived." Very balanced.

SPOTLIGHT: Of course. [*An understatement! – Ed.*]

GEORGE: And I had a number of letters printed in the Marvel Comics of mid-'60s, so if you go back and dig through those old and now immensely valuable comics, you'll see me popping up in the *Avengers* and *Fantastic Four* and things like that.

SPOTLIGHT: So as you were reading did you follow Stan Lee, or was it pretty much any Marvel comic that was available?

GEORGE: Well, I read all of the Marvel super hero titles but I read the other comics too. I still read DC and followed *Justice League* and things like that. And back in those days there were many other comics. I got into the Charlton characters, especially when Steve Ditko moved over there. He was one of my favorite artists and I loved the stuff he was doing with the Question and *Captain Atom* and stuff like that. So I had letters in some Charlton comics, too. Never had one in DC. In later life I became friends with Julius Schwartz and I always used to give him grief about that. "Julie, you never published my letters. Stan always published my letters, but you never did." And I would kid him about that. But that was great.

ONLY AERION MATTERED. ONLY HIM.
I WATCHED THE DRAGON COME, THE BLACK LANCE STILL ANGLED UPWARD.
"THE DRAGON, LOOK AT THE DRAGON," I THOUGHT, THEN REMEMBERED SUDDENLY, "NO! LOOK ONLY WHERE YOU MEAN TO STRIKE!"
A KNIGHT WHO HOLDS HIS LANCE HIGH AND BRINGS IT ON LINE AT THE LAST MOMENT ALWAYS RISKS LOWERING IT TOO FAR, THE OLD MAN HAD TOLD ME.

SPOTLIGHT: Oh, that's really cool. You were quite the prolific letter writer!

GEORGE: Of course, the dark side. In 1971 I graduated from journalism school with a Master's degree in journalism. I had started writing for comic fanzines in the '60s and inventing my own heroes and writing comic book stories about them. Of course, I couldn't draw, so they weren't comic strips. They were prose stories about super heroes of my own invention and they appeared in the early comic fanzines, those fanzines that came out in the mid-'60s when comic fandom began. And so in '71, when I had graduated college, I had my journalism degree and I had all these amateur stories, so I applied for a job with Marvel. But they turned me down.

SPOTLIGHT: Oh no! (*Laughter.*)

GEORGE: So there's a whole other life that I could have had. (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: But then we wouldn't have the *Songs of Ice and Fire*, we wouldn't have the *Hedge Knight*, come on!

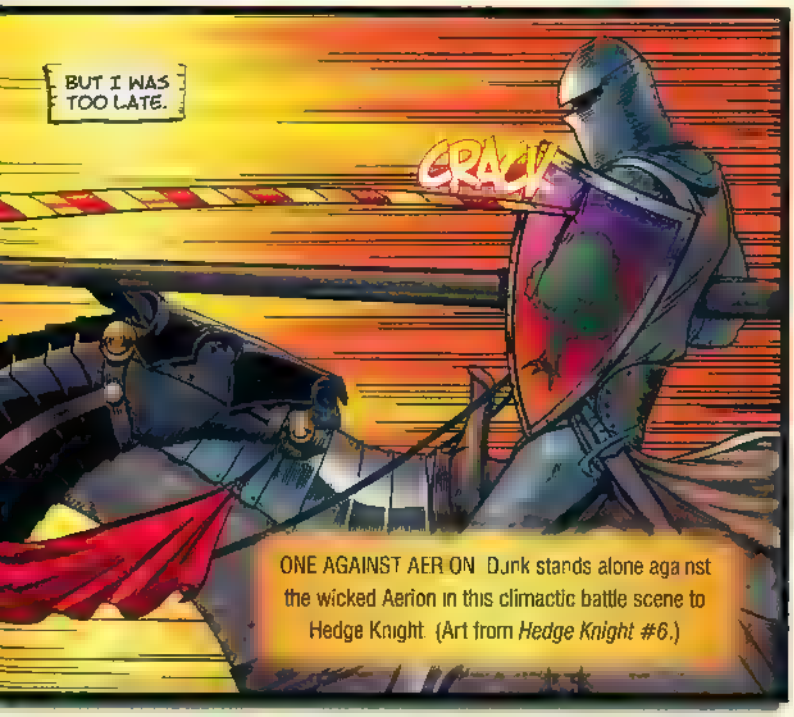
GEORGE: Yeah, truly.

"...Whenever I think of Dunk and Egg, I think of Mike S. Miller's versions of them. They've become the definitive Dunk and Egg, as far as I'm concerned."

– Martin on the art of Hedge Knight

The first *Wild Cards* books came out in the mid- 80s and that was the same time that *Watchmen* was coming out and the same time that Frank Miller was doing *Dark Knight* and *Wild Cards* was, I think in some ways, part of the same thing. It was like everybody was doing these new takes on super heroes where we were making them more realistic, a little darker, a little grittier, and *Wild Cards* was certainly part of that. We wanted to do super heroes but do them in a more science fictional way – make them a litt.e more realistic.

So, the *Wild Cards* series is still going on, I've created lots of characters for that, and I still enjoy doing them. I get my super-hero fix that way



ONE AGAINST AERION Dunk stands alone aga nst the wicked Aerion in this climactic battle scene to Hedge Knight (Art from *Hedge Knight #6.*)

SPOTLIGHT: So who is your favorite super hero?

GEORGE: Boy, my favorite super hero...That's tough. I love the Fantastic Four, like I said, and I think the Thing was definitely my favorite character from that. You know he's been around so long at this point that it's hard for anyone who's not of my age to realize how revolutionary a character the Thing was when he was first introduced in Fantastic Four. There had never been a character like that before. I mean, he was a hero but he was ugly and he was tormented. He didn't like being the way he was. He wanted to change even if it meant losing his powers, to go back and live a normal life. Well, we've seen a million characters like that since, but unti Stan Lee invented that character we had not seen any character like that. He was just astonishing and I think I still have a soft spot for him. And of course, Spider-Man too, when he came along a couple years later, he was an amazing character

SPOTLIGHT: So you applied and Marvel said, "No, not yet?"

GEORGE: That's right.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, I have to know: when you first started thinking about the *Hedge Knight*, did you ever think that it could, or would, become a comic?

GEORGE: No. No, I wasn't really thinking about comic books at that time and place

SPOTLIGHT: Did you ever do anything once you started being a novelist that you thought would be good for comics?

GEORGE: Well, there was *Wild Cards*...Marvel Epic did a number of comics based on *Wild Cards* (in 1990). Despite all my credentials in the world of science fiction and horror and fantasy, I still always had this secret love for super heroes – or not-so-secret love, actually – and *Wild Cards* grew, in part, out of that. It was a desire to do almost what I'd begun doing, tell the stories of super heroes, but tell them in prose, you know?

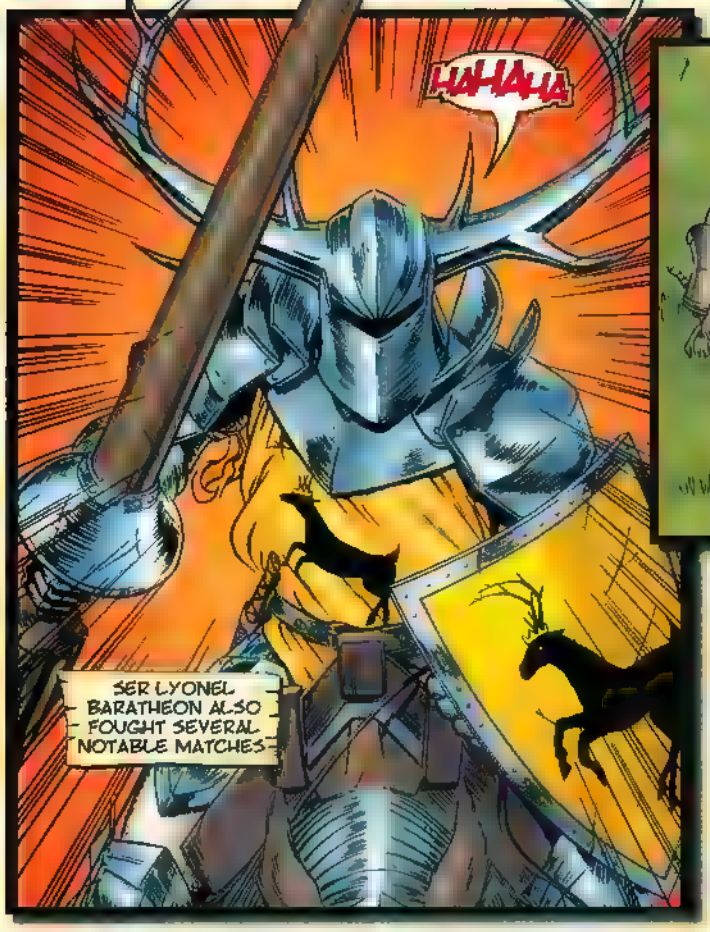
SPOTLIGHT: I see. So the heroic characters dealing with inner struggle – you kinda see it with Dunk. You like writing characters like that?

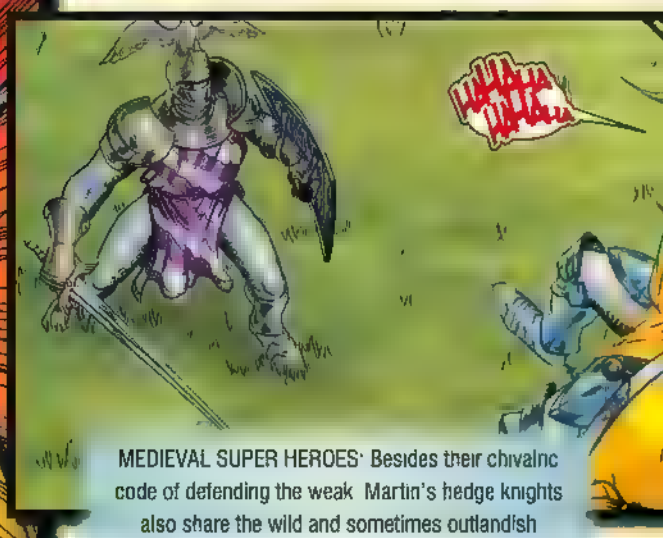
GEORGE: Yeah, I do. I think character is the heart of all story. Whether you're ta king about novels or comic books or movies or television, you know you have to have a good character at the heart of it. I often quote William Faulkner in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech where he said, "The human heart in conflict with itself is the only thing worth writing about." And I think that's true.

SPOTLIGHT: Were Dunk and Egg based on anybody?

GEORGE: No, not really. I think any character you create – particularly a viewpoint character – you put some of yourself in. That's one way you make a character come alive. But I can't claim that these characters are particularly autobiographical

SPOTLIGHT: What can you give us as setup for the next book adaptation, the *Sworn Sword*?





MEDIEVAL SUPER HEROES: Besides their chivalric code of defending the weak, Martin's hedge knights also share the wild and sometimes outlandish aspect of costumes. (Art from Hedge Knight #3.)

GEORGE: That's the second story of Dunk and Egg. It takes place a year and a half after the first one, so the two of them were already together and Dunk, who began as a hedge knight, which is basically a wandering knight who's wandering around looking for work, saying, "Anybody need a knight? Here I am. Feed me and I'll fight for you!", has now become a sworn sword, which means he has taken service with a lord. It's a promotion for Dunk in the social hierarchy of the time. But of course there are obligations that come with it and Dunk has particularly taken service with a very small lord who has a run-down little castle and has only one other knight in service. So his whole army consists of the two guys and whatever villagers he can round up. I wanted to write it to show in a fantasy context some of the more realistic aspects of what being a knight entailed. The whole conflict in the *Sworn Sword* takes place over a stream that flows between two lords and they're fighting over water. You read a lot of fantasy and you never get that kind of realism. You always get, "Oh my God! The Dark Lord is stirring and his evil minions are gonna come down and all life is gonna be wiped out! We have to fight the Dark Lord!" In real life, it tended to be much more fighting over the turnips, or in this case the water, and I wanted to do that kind of small scale, character-based story, so that's what the *Sworn Sword* is. It was a fun story to write. It was nice to come back to Dunk and Egg and pick them up and to have the chance to introduce some new characters.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you think that what you're writing now is influencing and maybe changing your direction in the stories of *Fire and Ice*?

GEORGE: I really don't know.

SPOTLIGHT: OK. So you're just learning a little bit more about your older characters that won't really figure into the stories?

GEORGE: Yeah, I mean there's a few threads from the Dunk and Egg stories that also come into play in the larger series, which takes place about a hundred years later. But not huge ones; it's more little threads.

SPOTLIGHT: What are some of your favorite fantasy novel series?

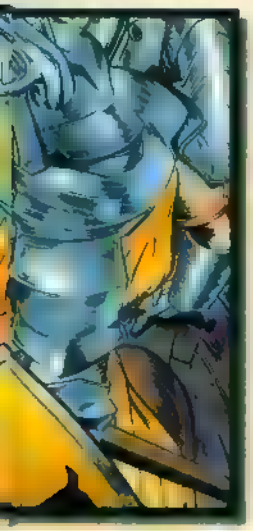
GEORGE: Well, there's many series that I like. First, I'm a huge Tolkien fan. I read him again when I was reading those *Spider-Man* and *Fantastic Four* comics and he had an immense impact on me as well. But there's many good fantasy series being done today by lots of young writers – people like Daniel Abraham, who I worked with on my novel *Hunter's Run* that's about to come out. Oh God, there's so many – Scott Lynch has an excellent series coming out called the *Lies of Locke Lamora*. I could probably name another dozen of them. There's a lot of good work in fantasy being done right now.

SPOTLIGHT: You're really big with the fans because you're very open with them and they get to talk to you about your series and things like that. Can you tell me a little bit about meeting your fans when you go to conventions?

GEORGE: I've always been a member of science fiction fandom, since the early '70s. I've always attended science fiction conventions, and even comic conventions. In fact, I attended the very first comic convention that was held in New York in 1963, I think it was. I met Steve Ditko there. There were about thirty people attending the convention.

SPOTLIGHT: (*Laughter.*) Thirty!

GEORGE: I was one of thirty, so I was there right at the birth of comic fandom. And now I go to San Diego Comic-Con and there's 150,000 people there.



SPOTLIGHT: Much, much increased

GEORGE: It's really changed. It's hard to find that *Fantastic Four #1* for a quarter any more

One of the great things about writing science fiction and fantasy is that we have this subculture of fandom where a writer can actually go and meet his readers. If you write mystery novels or mainstream literature you don't have that. You write your books and you send them out and maybe you do an autograph party and a few people show up, but you don't have that regular contact with your readers that we have. It's gratifying. You meet the people and they tell you what they think, what they like, what they don't like. It's the kind of feedback that I think is useful; you don't feel like you're writing in a vacuum or just doing the books and throwing them down a well.

Of course, with the popularity of *Ice and Fire*, there's a lot more fans. That's exciting in some ways, but it also does have its – well it creates some problems. Twenty years ago I would get a half dozen fan letters a year and I could respond to them all and now I'm three thousand emails behind in responding. I do an autograph party and the crowd is huge and I can only give each person thirty seconds while I'm signing their book and then I have to go on to the next person. But I enjoy meeting my fans and it's great to have the opportunity to do that.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of all of the new readers, do you think the comics are bringing in even more readers?

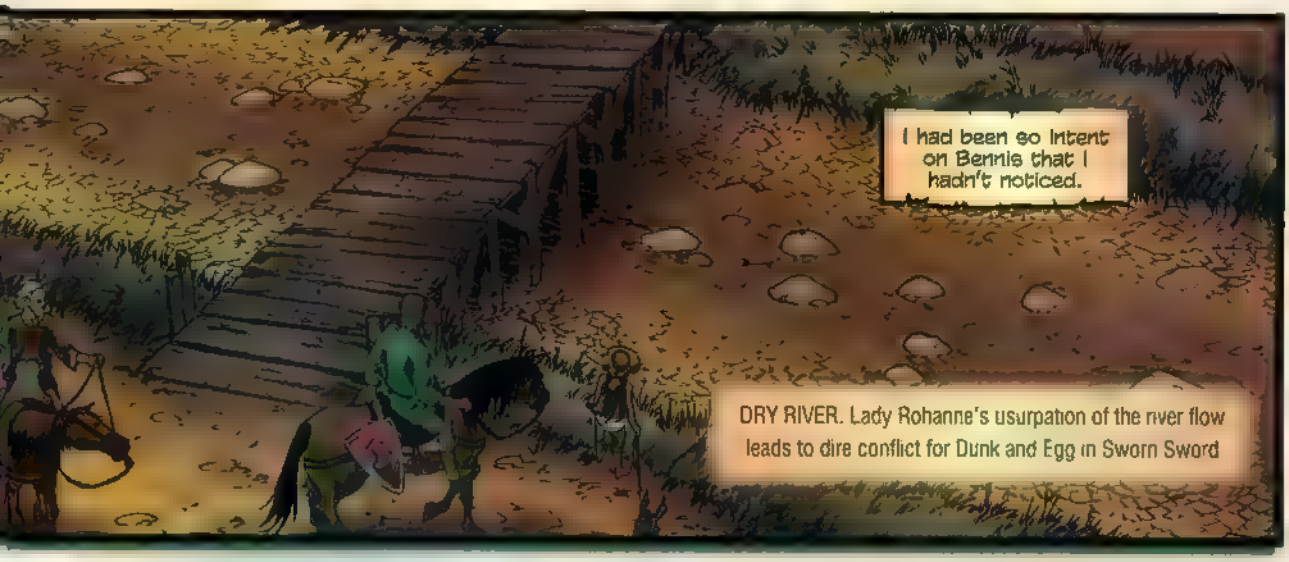
GEORGE: I hope so. In theory, yes, but I don't think anyone has done a study. My book readers hopefully go over and also buy the comic books. I would hope that some comic readers go over and enjoy Dunk and Egg and then they go out and seek the original novellas and that would carry them on to *Ice and Fire*. At least that's the idea, but whether it happens or not, I don't actually know. It's unfortunate that the world of comics and the world of books have become so separate in modern publishing, particularly in their distribution and sales mechanisms. I think that's changing a little with graphic novels coming out because now you have graphic novels being sold in bookstores. So you can go to the same place and you can buy a graphic novel and a regular novel, a science fiction novel, a fantasy novel, Tolkien, prose, all at the same store, which of course is a return to the way it was when I was a kid. I bought all my comic books at the little corner candy store in Bayonne, NJ and they were all on a wire rack and right next to them was the paperback wire rack where I bought all my science fiction. It was one of those spinner racks and you spin it around and they were two feet away from each other. Now, to buy a comic book, for the last twenty years you have to go to a special comic book store and I think a lot of book readers don't go to comic book stores.

SPOTLIGHT: Not so much

GEORGE: That's something that I think we need to fix.

SPOTLIGHT: So tell me about the first time you came on board for the *Hedge Knight* comics. How it all started, how Ben Avery ended up being the writer for it, the art of it, all of that. It's been quite an interesting history behind Marvel's new Best Selling Authors line

GEORGE: It started with Les Dabel and the Dabel brothers. Les was the one I had most contact with, although of course I met the rest of them later. Les sent me an email and said he was interested in acquiring the rights to *A Song of Ice and Fire* in comic book form. He talked a little about himself and his brothers and their credits. Well, they didn't really have many credits. I mean they had one or two books that they were self-publishing. So I wrote him a nice, polite brush-off letter saying, "Thanks for the interest in my work, but nah, I don't think so." In most cases that would have been it, but it wasn't the case with Les. He wrote me back about a month later and said, "We still wanna do it and, look here, we had this art done!" He sent me some art that he had done, character concepts, even a cover that they had had someone do. And I looked at all this and I said, "Well, you're very persistent and I still appreciate it, but


I had been so intent on Bennis that I hadn't noticed.
DRY RIVER. Lady Rohanne's usurpation of the river flow leads to dire conflict for Dunk and Egg in Sworn Sword

still – no. This art that you sent me, I hate this art. It's terrible art. Well, maybe it's not terrible, but it's not the style I like," you know?

And again, most people would have taken no for an answer. But another couple months passed and here he comes again. Now he's got new art he's sending me by different artists. And he just kept at it month after month after month and finally he sent me some art that I'm looking at and I'm saying, "This is actually very good. I like this art. He's found someone that's pretty good," and "Boy, these guys are persistent." But I still didn't want to give them *Ice and Fire*. *Ice and Fire* is huge and frankly, I don't think it could easily be done as a comic series. It's just too big a project. But by that time I had written and published the "Hedge Knight" story in *Legends*. So I said, "Look, I won't give you *A Song of Ice and Fire*, no matter how many different character concepts or covers you send me, but I'll let you do 'The Hedge Knight' and we'll see how you do with that."

To protect myself, I also made sure that I had a lot of involvement in it. So they found Mike S. Miller, the artist whose samples really, to my mind, capture Dunk and Egg. Now, whenever I think of Dunk and Egg, I think of Mike S. Miller's versions of them. They've become the definitive Dunk and Egg, as far as I'm concerned. And then for script writers, Les had four different script writers do something like the first three pages of "The Hedge Knight" and he sent me the scripts and asked, "Which one of these four would you like to use?" I picked Ben Avery. Actually, all four of them were pretty good. He found four pretty good adapters, but I thought Ben Avery was the best and I have not regretted that choice. Ben has been terrific. He really has a gift for capturing the story that I told in prose and for telling it in comic book form.

SPOTLIGHT: When you first saw Dunk and Egg in the art that was sent to you, was it different or was it just like how you always thought of them?

GEORGE: I had a picture of them in my head, which I tried to convey in my words as I told the story. Mike's picture was not precisely what I had in mind, but Mike's picture was so good that when I saw it, it sort of replaced what I had in my head. So I love his Dunk and Egg, they're terrific, and many of his versions of some of the other characters, too – people like Steely Pate or Old Ser Eustace Osgrey. All of these people, Mike does beautiful versions of them. I love the fact that he does faces. I mentioned my origins as a comic fan and that one of my favorite artists was Steve Ditko, from the early days when he was doing Spider-Man and Doctor Strange. And Ditko had many, many great gifts as an artist, but one of his greatest gifts was that he did wonderful faces; faces that were very different from each other, faces that had a lot of character. You look at some comic artists and they have male face/female face, and the only way you can tell one character from another is because their costumes are different colors. You know what I mean? I said, "Well, you know, a lot of my characters don't wear costumes, so we gotta get the faces so that you know who you're looking at here. We gotta get an artist who can really put character in a face." And Mike Miller is wonderful at that.

THE RED WIDOW: Lady Rohanne's reputation proceeds her, and Martin masterfullykeeps you guessing on if it's a reputation built on rumor - or one well-earned! (Art from *Sworn Sword #4*.)

Mike Miller's wonderful art, Ben Avery's incisive adaptations, and the realistic fantasy of George R. R. Martin are on continual display in Marvel's Best Selling Authors Title THE SWORN SWORD. The series is in full swing and concludes soon, but look for back issues at your local comic retailer or check out the upcoming collected edition when it hits stands! Also, the HEDGE KNIGHT is currently available in Marvel Premiere Edition HC and TPB, so you can get started on Martin's epic if you haven't already!

ADAPTING THE AUTHOR

Writer Ben Avery Is Entrusted With Bringing Martin's Vision To Life In Comics

Ben Avery comes to the *Hedge Knight* adaptations with a very diverse writing background. Avery talks about where this love comes from and how he was introduced to George R. R. Martin's dynamic creations Dunk and Egg in *The Hedge Knight* and *The Sworn Sword*, and *Spotlight* readers get an interesting glimpse into the life of the typically unheralded – but crucially important – fiction adapter.

SPOTLIGHT: When did your love affair with comics begin?

BEN: I've always loved comics. When I was a kid, I didn't have very many comics, but the ones I did have were treasured. And they've stuck with me. Some I still have, relics from my childhood. I still remember missing school for a dentist appointment and then going into the Stoppe Shoppe drugstore with my mouth all numb and my mother buying me a *Star Wars* comic. It was a special thing for me. I miss that.

SPOTLIGHT: Which influences – in and out of comics – have most affected you as a writer and why?

BEN: Around Xmas of 1980, I got two comics books that influenced me forever. One was a *Star Wars* comic and the other was an *Avengers* reprint (*Star Wars #33* and *Marvel Super Action #15*, reprinting *Avengers #56*). I read and reread them as a five or six year old and they still hold a piece of nostalgia for me. To me, they were dramatic and emotional and powerful and they have "haunted" me ever since. I kept the *Star Wars* comic, still have it somewhere, but haven't read it in a long time. The climax stuck with me, where Luke could kill the bad guy but instead has such control over the forces that he's able to just cut off the guy's bionic pieces. But I tracked down the *Avengers* comic and reread it recently. It withstood the test of time. Roy Thomas wrote the story.

The identifiable influences on my writing aren't comic writers though. C.S. Lewis is one you'll find references to and traces of Lewis in most of my writing. (In fact, I snuck a C.S. Lewis reference into the first *Hedge Knight*, but no one has ever found it, to my knowledge.) Terry Gilliam is another writer who has influenced my writing, especially his circular storytelling. I've found, strangely enough, that the movies of Bergman and Tarkovsky have also influenced my comic book writing style and, of course, George R.R. Martin. He's changed almost everything about how I look at telling stories.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you get involved with *Hedge Knight*? Were you already a fan of George R.R. Martin?

BEN: *Hedge Knight* was the first thing I read by Mr. Martin and I read it when I heard about the job. Of course, that first read-through hooked me. I not only wanted the job, I wanted to read everything. Normally, I stay away from those massive, multi-part, open-ended fantasy series. I want to know I'm going to get a beginning, a middle, and an end. Call me crazy, but I want an ending to the stories I read. And now my worst fears have come true. I start reading one of those massive, multi-part fantasy series (Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire*), I fall in love with the characters, and now I have to wait until the next book comes out. Worse, though, is that I'm a bigger fan of the Dunk and Egg stories, and I have to wait even longer, it sounds like, for the next Dunk and Egg story. Mike [Miller] was the one who introduced me to Martin's writing. He was assigned to be the artist on the book, and they needed a writer, so he told me to get the book, read it, and send a six-page adaptation of the first scene. There were some other people who were doing the same. Mr. Martin chose mine because I did everything I could to be true to the book. After all, it was "George R.R. Martin's *The Hedge Knight*," not "Ben Avery's."

SPOTLIGHT: Were you surprised you were picked as a writer? What did writing this comic mean for you personally and professionally?

CROSSING THE RIVERFLOW: Dunk and his squire Egg calculate their first meeting with the Red Widow as they cross through the water she is stealing! (Art from *Sworn Sword #3*.)

Knight, as a story, resonated [illegible] ideals of heroism in the face of reality struck a deep chord with me. And so I wanted to get the job in the end. It resulted in a strong friendship with Mike and I have come to know George as a friend as well. He has been a huge help to me, both on this project and as I make my next few steps professionally. The gig has obviously opened doors for me. Without it, I would not be writing comics and animation professionally. But it's been most satisfying on the personal levels.

SPOTLIGHT: What did you think the first time you saw the complete comic?

BEN: When I did the first *Hedge Knight*, Mike sent me the pages as he drew them. Everyday I expectantly opened my email to see the new page from Mike. He has the talent to take things I describe in the script and make the page look better than it looked in my head. Very few of the artists I've worked with have done that, since the images in your head are already idealized. Nothing can top that. But Mike has. And does.

In *Sworn Sword*, it was that first three pages that just made me giggle with glee on seeing it brought to life – the opening and then the two page splash. The page with Egg sitting on the horse in the first issue is a favorite of mine, but I also love the puppet shows in that first issue. I'm a puppeteer, and those scenes were fun to write. And more fun to see.

[illegible]

BEN: I'm currently working on *The Oz Wonderland Chronicles* (from BuyMeToys.com) and its spin-off series. I've got a kids adventure series of manga-styled graphic novels called *TimeFlyz* (about time traveling, uh, flies) and another series called *Kingdoms* for Zondervan. My day job is working with an animation company on a fantasy series I created. In the meantime, as *Sworn Sword* wraps up, I'm trying to get some more freelance work lined up and, of course, as always, trying to get some creator-owned projects in and running.

SPOTLIGHT: What can we expect from the *Sworn Sword* as it finishes up?

BEN: Expect the unexpected. That's what originally attracted me to *Hedge Knight* and all of George's work. He finds ways to take stories in directions you don't expect, and yet it makes complete sense. It's not a twist for a twist's sake. It comes from the characters. It's completely character-driven. I'm fairly certain that sometimes his characters surprise him.

Ben completes his collaboration with Mike S. Miller on SWORN SWORD with issue #6. Here's hoping we see more tales of Dunk and Egg from Ben, Mike and George in Marvel Best Selling Authors comics!

NOT A THREAT: But a promise. Lady Rohanne proves to be a woman of her word in *Sworn Sword #4*

A WRITER'S FAIRY TALE

BY DUGAN TRODGLEN

Multi-Skilled Talent C.B. Cebulski Brings Timeless Fairy Tale Enchantment To The Marvel Universe

By adapting some of the best fantasy literature the genre has to offer into comic book storytelling, the Marvel Best-Selling Authors line inevitably attracts readers who might not otherwise have counted themselves among the comic book buying public. Once those folks discover the full breadth of what comic book and graphic storytelling have to deliver, those same people will often branch out and check out other Marvel offerings.

One series that seems like a nice bridge to the rich world of Marvel characters is the wonderful *Fairy Tales* books written by C.B. Cebulski, a writer/editor who also helped develop the *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* video game. In the spellbinding trio of this four-issue limited series, C.B. used the X-Men, Spider-Man, and the Avengers, respectively, to tell fresh versions of classic fairy tales, intermixing the Marvel heroes with a wide spectrum of notable folk tales. Each issue is uniquely and gorgeously illustrated by different artists, each hand-picked for their particular tale. C.B.'s *Fairy Tales* are wonderfully told stories whether or not the reader has affection for the classic Marvel characters that are featured in them. *Marvel Spotlight* talked to C.B Cebulski about what has gone into this distinct line of books.

SPOTLIGHT: When you first joined Marvel, it was more as an editor/talent scout, right?

C.B. I was originally a freelance writer and came on as writer/consultant on the Marvel Mangaverse comics, where we created a manga-inspired version of the regular Marvel Universe. The editor was Brian Smith· "Smitty". I met him through Joe Quesada and then-publisher Bill Jemas. He hired me to work on the Mangaverse book and he was my entry into getting a fulltime position at Marvel. I was originally an associate editor, working on our Ultimate line with Smitty and Ralph Macchio. They soon recognized that my strength seemed to be in working with the talent: knowing how to talk to writers and artists and being someone who could lend an ear and speak the same language as these guys. So they moved me over to become Marvel's first Talent Manager/Talent Scout in a long time.

SPOTLIGHT: Aside from the work you did in the Mangaverse, when did your editing/management position start to include writing?

C.B. I first wrote for a manga/anime company called Central Park Media, and then I did a couple of independent comics, as well as a few *Star Wars* short stories for Dark Horse. But once I became an editor at Marvel, Joe and Bill had a rule that you cannot be on the editorial staff and write comics for Marvel, with very little exception. I was very happy with what I was doing at the time and I kind of put the writing aside. But after about three years the bug bit me again and it was very clear that the only way for me to write was to leave Marvel. So that's what I did. I made the decision to quit and try to go back into writing full time. It was almost like going back to the beginning because Joe and Bill were very strict about the appearance of nepotism. Old Marvel editors would apparently give their buddies books to work on to help pay the bills. Joe was very clear that if I wanted to write for Marvel I would have to start over and prove myself; I wasn't going to get any favors. When my stuff would get reviews, I would actually have a harder time because of my past connection with Marvel. It took a while to get my foot in the door. I did some creator-owned work for Image and I eventually got that foot back in at Marvel with short stories in the *Spider-Man Unlimited* and *X-Men Unlimited* anthology books.

SPOTLIGHT: What is your current position with Marvel?

C.B. I was writing freelance and Marvel asked me to come back in a consulting capacity a couple of days a week. I was mostly working from home but would come in for a couple of hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays to help out with talent coordination. I have a good relationship with artists like Jim Cheung, Steve McNiven and David Finch, for instance, as I originally brought them into the Marvel fold. So I was to deal with any high-level talent concerns and write on the side. That sort of morphed into what I have now, which is an exclusive contract with Marvel for both my consulting and my writing.

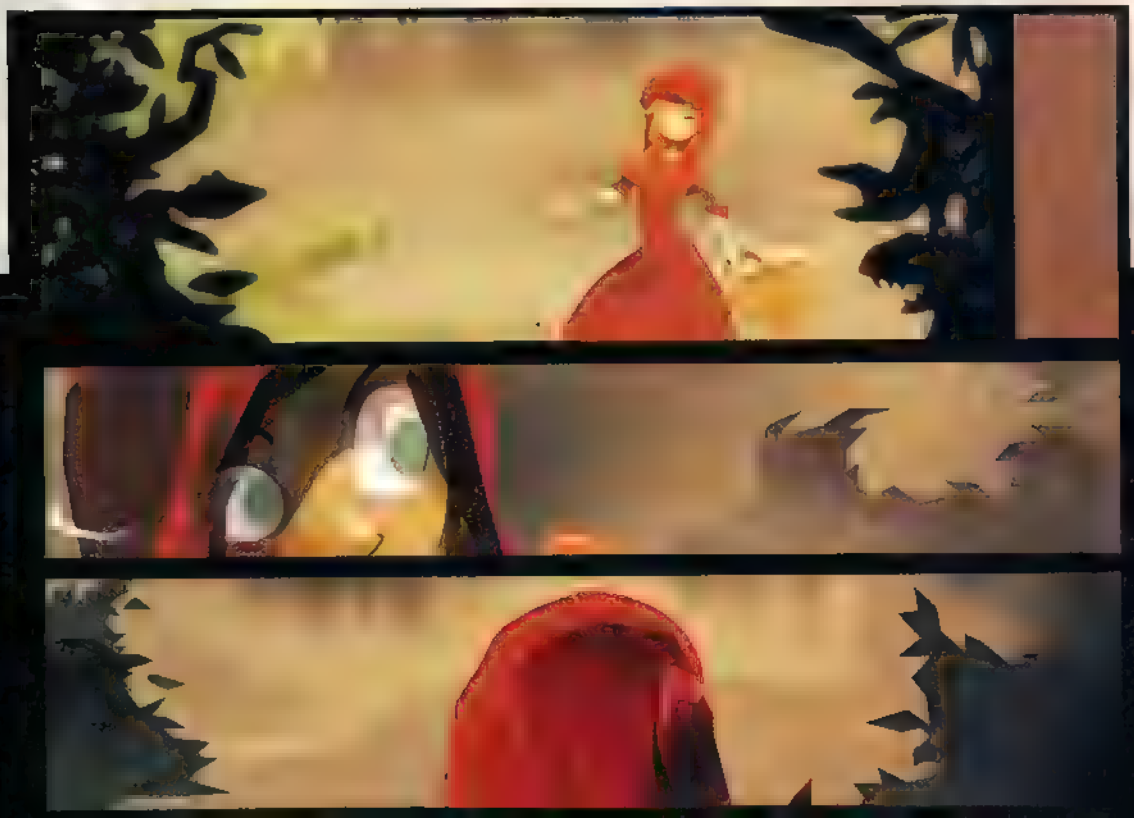
SPOTLIGHT: That certainly seems like a unique arrangement.

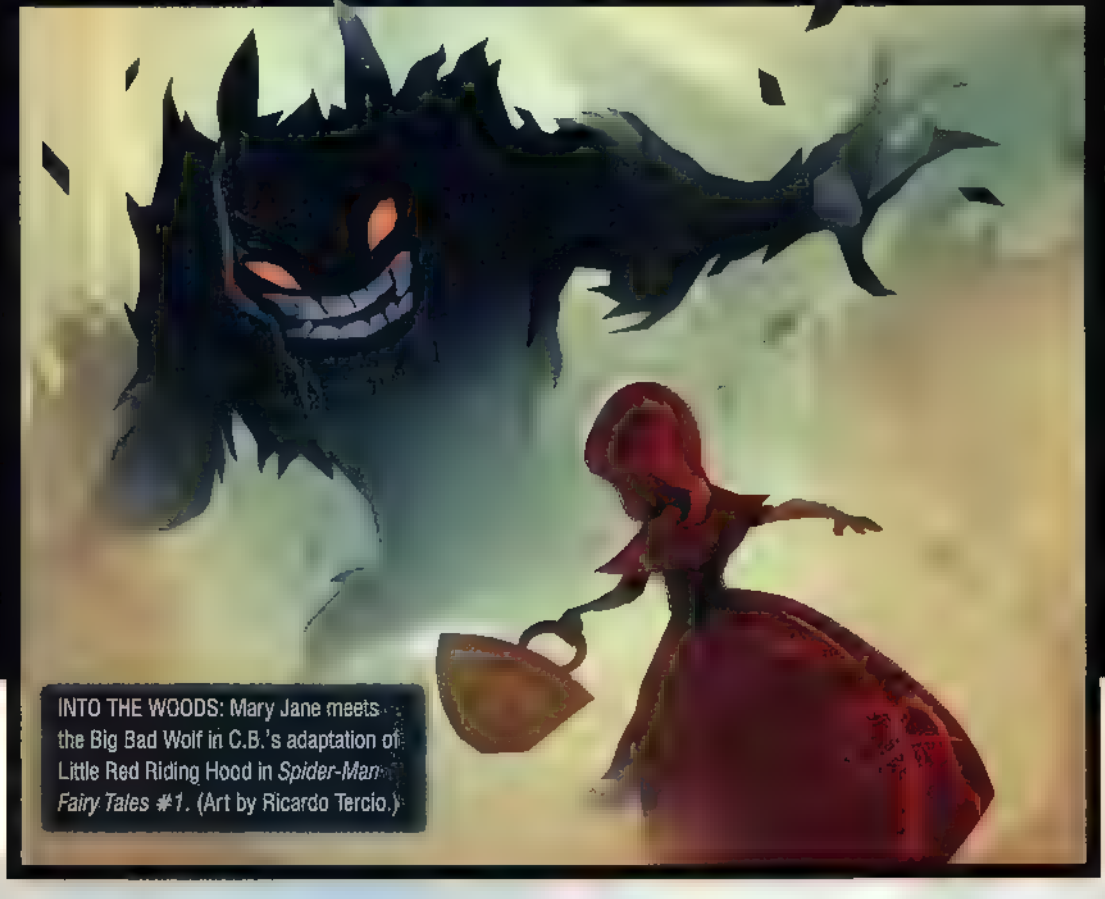
C.B. Yeah, it is. It's interesting. It seems like positions form around me. There was no talent manager position at Marvel but they created it based on what my talents were and, likewise, this time there was no consultant job like mine, but we hashed it out and made one!

SPOTLIGHT: When you returned to Marvel to write, was *X-Men Fairy Tales* your first book other than the anthology stories?

C.B. Yes it was.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you come up with the concept?





INTO THE WOODS: Mary Jane meets the Big Bad Wolf in C.B.'s adaptation of Little Red Riding Hood in *Spider-Man Fairy Tales #1*. (Art by Ricardo Tercio.)

C.B. Well, it all came from my need to get a job! (*Laughter*) Actually Marvel had had a lot of success with the all-ages Marvel Age line, which evolved into Marvel Adventures. The collected editions of these kid-friendly, continuity-free books seemed to hold a great appeal to buyers in the mainstream market, the big books chains as well as Target and Wal-Mart. So they were looking for more all-ages material. What they found was that a lot of the parents who were buying this stuff for their children were not just fans from the Marvel movie adaptations, but they were actually old Marvel fans who were looking for gateway books to get their kids into the world of Marvel Comics. They could read to or with their kids about characters that they themselves were fans of.

I was always a big fan of *Uncanny X-Men #153*, where Kitty Pryde tells the pirate tale to Colossus' younger sister Illyana and puts the X-Men characters into the story. I proposed something similar where characters would tell stories to a group of children about their culture using fairy tales. Originally each issue would have a framing sequence with one of the X-Men telling kind of a cautionary tale to the students at the Xavier Institute. Wolverine would tell a Japanese Fairy Tale, Storm an African one, etc. Somehow or other, Marvel decided after reading the story concepts that they wanted to keep the fairy tales intact but cut out the framing sequences to provide more pages for the fairy tales. I think they also felt the framing sequences tied it too close to actual continuity and were unnecessary.

But with *X-Men Fairy Tales* we kept the international flavor with the various stories and as a result some people asked why we used those and not others that are better known. The reason was that each one was based on the various nationalities of the X-Men, something that was probably less obvious without the framing sequences.

So Marvel was happy with the success of the book and they decided to continue the concept and approved *Avengers Fairy Tales*. I started working on that and we decided to deal with more mainstream fairy tales. But as we were getting into it Marvel wanted some more Spider-Man books out there with the *Spider-Man 3* film approaching. They asked me to put the Avengers book on hold and come up with ideas for *Spider-Man Fairy Tales*. That's when I went back to the drawing board and came up with a mix of the well-known stories with some more tales from other cultures. Now we're done with that and I'm back to the Avengers book, which I'm very excited about.

SPOTLIGHT: How did the process of picking artists for specific issues work? Planning and producing a series usually involves working with one artist.

C.B. It was a combination of me and the various editors. On *X-Men Fairy Tales* I worked with two editors, Mackenzie Cadenhead and Nate Cosby. We did kind of a 50/50 split. I brought in the two Japanese artists, Sana Takeda and Kei Kobayashi to the table, Nate suggested Kyle Baker for the African story and I thought there was no way we'd get him. But Nate is bold like that and cold-called Kyle Baker who said, "Sure, I'd love to do it!" I suggested Bill Sienkiewicz because I've always been a huge fan of his art, and they contacted him. At first he couldn't do it, but ended up with an opening in his schedule. I was pleased as punch about that.

From there it's been a mixture as well. We would riff on names

we'd like on the book and whoever had a relationship with a given artist would contact them. Marvel was very pleased with Kei's story on X-Men, so we brought him back for a Spider-Man story. We've been so happy with everyone we've worked with.

SPOTLIGHT: The most recent trade paperback collection to come out is *Spider-Man Fairy Tales*. Can you go through the various issues and tell us a little about each one?

C.B. Sure. The first story is "Little Red Riding Hood" with Mary Jane as the title character. This was illustrated with a youthful style by Ricardo Tercio from Portugal. It's a sweet story visually but I also like the way Ric drew that last panel where Peter and Mary Jane walk down that path together "happily ever after" but there's these ominous shadows representing classic fairy tale versions of old Spider-Man villains.

PETER AND JONAH: Portuguese artist Ricardo Tercio brings an appropriately international flair to Marvel's fairy tales. (Art from *SMFT #1.*)

On the second issue we were fortunate to have Niko Henrichon available to draw an African tale. We knew we wanted another African story and were having trouble coming up with just the right one. Nick Lowe finally brought up the *Anansi Boys* by Neil Gaiman and the legend of Anansi the Spider. So it worked out perfectly from there, obviously. I'm giving away a lot of secrets here. I didn't come up with all of this myself! (*Laughter.*) But it was great how the tale lent itself to the character of Anansi's son learning to accept the responsibility to go along with his power, much like Peter Parker.

Then we move to a Japanese tale by Ken Kobayashi. In Japanese mythology there are a lot of animal-themed icons to explain different tropes of their religion. Looking at some of the old Japanese books and texts that I have, I came across the tale of the boy who is tempted by the spider and forced to choose between good and evil. And it worked well in using all of the animal-themed Spider-Man villains like the Vulture and the Lizard.

SPOTLIGHT: There's no shortage of those!

C.B. Nope, not in Spider-Man villains!

In the fourth story we did "Cinderella," and reversed genders by having Peter in the Cinderella role with evil stepbrothers. Mary Jane was the serving girl and Gwen Stacy was the princess. It played into the Spider-Man mythos with the pumpkins and stuff, bringing in the Osbornes and their Green Goblin lineage. Originally, that one had a happy ending but Molly Lazer, another editor, is a big fairy tale lover and likes sticking to the original stories, and she said we really needed more of an unhappy ending. Mindy Owens co-wrote that with me and came up with the beginning, featuring Uncle Ben's death and Peter becoming a ward of the Osbornes.

SPOTLIGHT: Coming out now is the new series *Avengers Fairy Tales*, featuring Marvel's "varsity" heroes, as the Avengers are often known. The core of the team has always been a mix of big names like Captain America, Iron Man and Thor, along with great, lesser-known characters like Vision, Scarlet Witch and the Wasp. That's a rich tapestry to pull from for these stories.

C.B. Yeah, and we really use that tapestry. Issue one is the first one I came up with back before we sidetracked into the Spider-Man series. It's "Peter Pan," which is my all-time favorite story. I love the parallel between Peter Pan and Captain America. Peter

Pan never grew up and Cap has found himself in a similar position: he fought in World War II, but as a result of being frozen in ice has found himself in the 21st Century no older than he was in the '40s. Of course, Steve Rogers is more interested in growing up and adjusting, unlike Peter Pan, but I thought there was a great story to be told there. Like many of these stories, things blended so well. The Wasp is obviously Tinkerbell, and Wendy is Wanda, the Scarlet Witch. We tie it in to Wanda's mutant powers manifesting as she becomes a teenager and being scared of them and having the opportunity to go to Never Neverland where she doesn't have to get older and deal with her mutant abilities. This story is drawn by another Portugese artist, Joao Lemos. He has an incredible style.

Issue two is "Pinocchio," the puppet who wants to be a real boy.

SPOTLIGHT: Oh, I know who that's going to be!

C.B. Yep. The Vision: the android who wishes to be human. In this version, his father Geppetto is Hank Pym, who in the comics actually created the robot Ultron, who in turn created the Vision. It's another of those perfect fits. We use Jiminy Cricket, even though that was a Disney addition to the story. Again, that's going to be "played" by the Wasp. Not that every small character is going to be the Wasp! (*Laughter.*) This story is illustrated by Nuno Plati, a studio mate of Joao's. They also both share a studio with Ricardo Tercio. I have "discovered" a whole world of fantastic artists from over there; it's great.

The next story is "Alice in Wonderland," illustrated by Takeshi Miyazawa, who did *Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*. He's over in Japan with a successful Manga career, but we've been friends for many years and wanted to work together, so he jumped at the chance to do this book. This is going to be told with some of the Young Avengers characters, and Alice will be Cassie Lang, aka Stature. She has the ability to grow and shrink, so that worked well. The original tale is another coming-of-age tale about the lessons you learn as you get older, and it fit with Cassie dealing with the death of her father (Scott Lang, Ant-Man) and the disrespect the Young Avengers think they have received from Captain America and the other Avengers. So she will be going up against Wonderland-ish versions of the Avengers and learning lessons on the way on what it means to be an Avenger.

"Momotaro, the Peach Boy": C.B.'s first foray into *Fairy Tales* was to adapt a sweet Japanese folktale featuring Cyclops. (Cover art to *X-Men Fairy Tales #1* by Sana Takeda.)

WEB OF ROMANCE: Gwen Stacy and Peter Parker are lead players in *Spider-Man Fairy Tales #4*, C.B.'s novel adaptation of Cinderella. (Art by Nick Dragotta and Mike Allred.)

The last issue is "Wizard of Oz". Again, *Avengers Fairy Tales* was supposed to happen before we delivered Spider-Man, so the timing is different than expected here. This was to be related to the *House of M* series from a couple of years ago, but it still works. Dorothy is going to be She-Hulk, and instead of ruby slippers she gets emerald slippers! She goes up against Magneto and Scarlet Witch in the ruby-colored castle. We switched up the colors!

The theme will not be as *House of M*-centric, but we're keeping that general setup. She'll meet the Scarecrow and everybody, but we'll keep those secret for now. Okay, one peek: Tin Man is obviously Iron Man! We don't have an artist as of this interview, but there are several we're considering. But I do want to mention that French artist Claire Wendling is doing all of the covers.

SPOTLIGHT: That cover to *Avengers Fairy Tales #1* is just beautiful.

C.B. She's fantastic, and it's hard to get her, as she illustrates infrequently but I begged and pleaded with Molly to get Claire on board for all four covers. We're really lucky she agreed because she is very picky about what she does.

Thanks very much to C.B. Cebulski for spinning these enchanting stories, and we look forward to AVENGERS FAIRY TALES! In the meantime, check out the X-MEN FAIRY TALES and SPIDER-MAN FAIRY TALES trade paperbacks wherever you buy your books!

MARVEL AND VIDEO GAMING: AN ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

By Dugan Trodglen

Aside from writing and consulting with Marvel, the multi-talented C.B. Cebulski found the time to co-write the ultra-popular *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* video game for Activision. C.B. quickly discovered that the world of video games can differ wildly from the world of comics. *Spotlight* talked to him about his experience.

SPOTLIGHT: You helped develop the wildly popular *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* video game. How did you get involved in that?

C.B.: I was contacted by Marvel's video game liaison/consultant Ames Kirshen (there's a different person in place now). I had just quit my Marvel editorial position to pursue my writing and he said that Activision was looking for someone to help write the *Ultimate Alliance* game. They needed someone who is intimately familiar with the characters and storylines and who knows all of the editors, because they wanted to be as updated as possible. The problem in the past was that the scripts would get written and it would take them two years to program the game. When the game came out, the characters might be dead, or the plots were old and outdated.

SPOTLIGHT: Or they'd have new costumes…

C.B.: Exactly. They wanted someone who knew what was going to be happening at Marvel a year to a year and a half in advance so the game would be really relevant and modern. I went out to interview with Activision and Raven Studios who did the development. I met with Bob Love, the writer they had hired. We all clicked and went from there. It was a really good relationship because I represented the Marvel side of things and brought a lot of knowledge of characters and could help make the dialogue as authentic as possible. I was also able to get them to include cool things like the new, very popular character Winter Soldier and also Moon Knight, who was making a comeback.

SPOTLIGHT: What did you think of the experience?

C.B.: I thought it was fantastic. It wasn't easy. A game is hard work. With a comic you can sit back and write 22 pages, and pretty much anything you come up with is something the artist can draw. What I learned quickly with games is that as much as you hear about "anything is possible," that's just not true, and this goes with CGI in movies, as well. There are limitations in the platforms and memory. There were ideas I threw out there that were immediately shot down. I had to learn about voice actors' rates and other things that I had no idea went into the voice acting aspect. It was just an eye-opening experience.

And just the sheer amount of writing was something I never imagined. In comics you have one storyline with subplots. Here you have to anticipate the player's every move. If the player goes this way, the storyline goes one way, and if he goes another, the storyline changes as well. It was something I wasn't ready for. We had huge graphs and pie charts, and ladders and trees leading everywhere. It was overwhelming at times. A standard comic book script for a 22-page comic runs from 22 pages to 40 or so depending on how much detail you put in. The final *Ultimate Alliance* script was almost 1200 pages! We used five reams of paper just to print out a proof! But it was an amazing experience.

Those who have played the game agree, C.B. Thanks!

MARVEL BEST-SELLING AUTHORS

ANITA BLAKE, VAMPIRE HUNTER: GUILTY PLEASURES #9
MARCH 2008

HEDGE KNIGHT II: SWORN SWORD #6
MARCH 2008